

ROY L. SMITH

TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF

*The
Carpenter's
Son*



TIDINGS

Materials for Christian Evangelism

1908 Grand Avenue
Nashville 5, Tennessee

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THE CARPENTER'S SON

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Chapter 1

Something New Under the Sun

ONLY A LITTLE LESS than 2,000 years ago there sprang up among the peasants of a rural province in the Near East a religious movement which, within the space of no more than a hundred years, and in spite of opposition that became extremely bitter, spread across the whole of the Mediterranean world. In the process of spreading, it produced a quality of life quite unlike anything that the world had ever known. With no more than a half-century of momentum behind it, there was scarcely a city of 5,000 anywhere in the Roman Empire which did not include in its population at least a small cell of believers who called themselves an *ekklesia*. This Greek word has come down to us in English as "church"; but, in the speech of that day, it meant no more than "society," or "association."

Deep Roots

Actually, the movement was not a thing entirely new, for its roots ran deep in an earlier faith—one in which its founder had been reared. It was a little like a green shoot springing up from

an old stump, except that it exhibited a series of qualities quite distinct from the characteristics of the parent stock. So sturdy did it become that by the time 300 years had elapsed one of its adherents ascended to the throne of Rome.

Not the least amazing fact connected with the rise of the new faith was the almost complete silence of the historians who lived and wrote while it was rising to maturity. There were excellent writers living at the time, and they wrote about weighty matters in a highly intelligent fashion. Moreover, the Roman Government must have accumulated a mass of evidence in the case. But, with the exception of minor references buried here and there in occasional books on other subjects, there is no record of the rise of the faith or of the development of the *ekklesia* to which the student can go outside of the Christian New Testament itself.

It becomes necessary, therefore, for any writer who undertakes to reconstruct the story of those early years to gather his facts piecemeal from a wide variety of sources and fit them together as best he can, jigsaw puzzle fashion. This study is one small effort in that direction. In hunting down the facts—often very elusive—the writer was moved to wonder many times what an enterprising modern reporter might have done with the story had there been a *New York Times* or a *Manchester Guardian* published in the city of Rome in the year A.D. 100.

A Mighty Force

A mighty force was generating among the declassed, the enslaved, and the inarticulate which was to transform the world. And no responsible Roman seems to have been aware of it. Certainly none understood it. The silence of all the reputable historians of the times regarding the hundreds of *ekklesia* scattered everywhere throughout the Empire is one of the most amazing facts of ancient history.

Perhaps the political and intellectual leaders were deceived by the fact that there was no talk among the members of the *ekklesia* regarding armed forces, military strategy, logistics, or budgets. No one suggested revolt; no one advocated any economic theory; no one proposed the support of any candidates for office.

Instead, inspired individuals travelled across the highways of the world on commercial errands or personal missions and met at night with the little cells of believers in the kitchens of the big houses or upper rooms in caravansaries. Inside the meetings they compared their spiritual experiences, they talked about their common hopes, and they exhorted one another to faithfulness.

A Person-Centered Movement

Central in the conversations that went on between members of the *ekklesia* was the name of a Jew who had grown up in a Palestinian city called Nazareth. Every week, on the evening of the first day of the week, the believers met to confer, to compare their experiences, to encourage one another, and to remind all who assembled regarding the teachings of their Lord. Because of this custom they referred to the first day of the week as "the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10).

Any person desiring to become a member of the cell was required to do nothing more than submit to a simple rite of baptism and join with the group in reciting a brief creed of three words—"Jesus is Lord" (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11). In this simple process a brotherhood of faith was developing across the earth, composed of those who declared that they had entered into an entirely new life since they had "believed."

Oddly enough, neither the founder of the faith nor any of his early collaborators could have been described as religious leaders previous to the time the new movement got under way. None of them could boast of any technical training in religion. We do not know that any of them (with the exception of the founder of the faith) were even known to be devout men prior to the time they were called to lead in the new movement. It is reasonable to infer that they were, of course, but we have no exact knowledge in the case.

It is also evident that almost without exception the original leaders were men well past middle age when they became affiliated with the movement.¹ They might have been elders in their communities but they were surcharged with enthusiasm—the irrepressible expression of a spirit which was born within them as a result of their spiritual experience with their leader.

The Humblest Levels of Society

A second interesting fact that comes to light upon an examination of the historical sources is that the first generation of con-

¹ Gerontologists are rather generally agreed that the average life expectancy in the city of Rome, about the middle of the first Christian century, was no more than twenty-five years. Jesus is reported to have begun his public ministry about the time he was thirty years of age (Luke 3:23). This means that he was not thought of as being a youth. The popular concept of the "young and fearless prophet" is a literary figure, and not an historical reality. To the eyes of Nazareth, he must have appeared as a man rather well along in years on that historic sabbath when he occupied the pulpit of the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:16-30).

verts was recruited—with no more than occasional exceptions—from the humblest levels of society. The greatest evangelist the movement ever produced, in writing to one of the *ekklesia* at least a generation following the death of the movement's founder, said: “. . . not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth” (1 Cor. 1:26). But even the depressed, the exploited, the enslaved, the propertyless, and the underdogs exhibited such a remarkable ability to live magnificently under the influence of the new faith that they soon distinguished themselves as unique individuals; and believers came to be known as people of “the Way.”

Quite unlike the pagans among whom they lived and who erected magnificent temples and shrines in honor of their pagan divinities, the people of “the Way” owned no property, built no worship centers, and ignored the usual trappings of organized religion.

The first great money raising campaign of which we have any knowledge was an effort to gather funds to be used in providing relief for destitute members of the movement (I Cor. 16:1). Indeed, there is no actual evidence of any cell owning property in the form of real estate until well up toward the beginning of the third century. Even as late as the middle of the second century of the movement's existence believers were taunted with the charge (which was quite true) that their assemblies were nothing more than “kitchen meetings,” quite without social importance or official standing. And they were content to be thus taunted.

Freedom from Organization

A third oddity about the movement was the fact that its founder seems to have made no effort to provide it with any form of organization. His original band of disciples had but a single officer (John 13:29), and in the end the individual who served in that capacity proved to be both a thief (John 12:6) and a traitor (Luke 22:48). No provision was made for selecting any successor and, so far as is known, no person was ever chosen to serve in his place.

There was organization aplenty in the religious life of the time, and the faith out of which the movement sprang was disciplined down to the last detail. But each *ekklesia* was left altogether to its own devices in this regard. Individual leaders here and there came to have great influence and, as an inevitable consequence, exercised a certain amount of authority. But theirs was the power of personality and was in no sense the product of any constitutional devising.

Dependence upon Individuals

A fourth unusual characteristic of the movement was that, for the most part, the founder's teachings were entrusted to individuals, twos, and threes, in the course of private conversations. Only on rare occasions did he speak to great audiences, and there is no record of his ever having delivered a formal address to which he had given protracted preparation. There was an element of spontaneity about him that was very captivating and, at the same time, very compelling. He seems to have been content to kindle a fire of faith within the souls of individuals, apparently confident that, when an inner experience had been multiplied among the multitudes, it would have the effect of transforming the life of all the world.

This individualistic aspect of the movement must not be allowed to obscure its major objective. Although it aimed at the transformation of individuals, *it was thrust into the world as a global enterprise which was to include all mankind (Mark 16:15).*

The older religious faith out of which the movement sprang was nationalistic. A series of historical circumstances had made it intensely introversive, and the orthodox resorted to every possible device to hold themselves aloof from the world while living in it.

It was strictly forbidden, for example, that the faithful should ever eat with a "foreigner." They could not drink from the same vessel. On certain holy days even the slightest contact with an outsider was esteemed to be contaminating.

An aggressive campaign was waged for the purpose of winning converts from among the pagans, but every proselyte was required to undergo severe physical rites which forever thereafter set him apart from all other men. Every man's status as one of the elect depended upon the strictness with which he held himself aloof from the world about him.

Declaration of Spiritual Independence

The new movement developed entirely outside the established faith which gave it birth. The teaching which produced the movement was, in effect, a declaration of spiritual independence. The first generation of leaders made a more or less conciliatory effort to cultivate the goodwill of the authorities inside the parent religious system; but when they were rebuffed, they set off on their own, quite independent of any priestly sanction, legal endorsement, or racial restraint. In doing so, they established their new faith as a world religion; and, within the space of no more than a hundred years, the number of adherents who claimed kinship with the original, or parent, faith was infinitesimal.

New Values

The fifth distinguishing characteristic of the movement was its entirely new set of values. Instead of glorifying aggressors, self-seekers, the proud, the powerful, and the rich, it extolled the meek, the humble, the peacemakers, the patient, and those who forgave their enemies. Indeed, the founder of the movement once said that the greatest among them would be one who served the most of them (Matt. 23:11).

All this had the effect of cutting squarely across every accepted standard of behavior and morals then current. Among the Romans, humility was esteemed to be a weakness. To forgive was only a little less than cowardice, and to be patient was to be pathetic. Pride was generally considered a mark of nobility; self-assertion was applauded; and mercy was held in contempt while justice wore a price tag.

It was inevitable that a religion which advocated such "vices" as meekness, peace, forgiveness, and love should suffer condemnation at the hands of a civilization which esteemed brutality, corruption, trickery, and sex license as being virtuous.

Centrality of Jesus

The sixth distinguishing characteristic of the new religious movement was the centrality it ascribed to a man named Jesus—an otherwise unknown individual who lived anonymously for the first thirty years of his life in a city called Nazareth in the Palestinian province known as Galilee.

Practically nothing is known about Jesus' personal life or activity prior to his thirtieth birthday beyond the fact that he seems to have been a respected craftsman and businessman of the community who lived the life of a devout layman, according to the standards of the time, without assuming official responsibility of any kind.

From his youth up he seems to have been a deeply religious person (Luke 2:41-51), regular in his attendance upon the services of the synagogue of his home community (Luke 4:16) and faithful in his attendance upon the annual religious feasts of the Jews in Jerusalem.

About the time he became thirty years of age (Luke 3:23), however, he was profoundly moved by the preaching of a desert hermit known as John the Baptist; and, having undergone an initiatory rite at the latter's hands, he launched out on his career as a wandering teacher and preacher. In time he gathered about himself a little company of about twelve disciples whom he trained and whom he commissioned to go preach and teach his ideas concerning God, life, religion, man, and society.

A Unique Quality of Life

From the first there was something very mystifying about Jesus—a quality of life and mind altogether unlike anything his disciples had ever known. There was no one in all the world quite like him. No other man lived—or ever had lived—with whom he could be compared. His serenity in the face of opposition, his calm assurance when he talked about God and life, his uncanny ability to probe the depths of men's minds and hearts, the authoritative way in which he spoke, his frequent assumption of majestic powers, and his evident intimacy with the Divine—all convinced his friends that, in some strange way they were never quite able to define, he was related to the Most High. Even strangers felt it the first time they met him (John 3:2). They were aware of much more in him and about him than they were able to analyze. Eventually, the more thoughtful and spiritually adventurous among them came to the conclusion that he was, actually, God in some disguise—that he was the Divine revealing himself to men.

Following his death and the amazing circumstances associated therewith, including the fact that more than five hundred persons declared in the most solemn manner, and with undeviating conviction, that they had seen him alive after he had been officially pronounced dead, the original band of disciples hurried out into the world outside Jerusalem declaring that he had been the Son of God. Because they steadfastly believed that he had risen from the dead and was alive, they became convinced that the things he had said, the doctrines he had preached, and the judgments he had pronounced were as true and as eternal as God himself.

"The Word Became Flesh"

It was with this conviction and with this faith that the new movement was launched. So firmly was this belief held by tens of thousands of honest people that they went shouting and singing to their death as martyrs. Everywhere plain and humble people began declaring their belief that he had, actually, been God in disguise. One of the great thinkers of the movement expressed the idea in these words: "... the word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Believing that, even death held no terrors for them.

Because of what he had been, men accepted what he had said as though it had been the exact word of God. The movement, therefore, draped itself about the twin poles of what he was and what he had taught. The missionaries of the new religion enjoyed a vast advantage: They contented themselves in declaring two things: (1) Jesus was the Son of God and (2) the way

of life he taught had the endorsement of God. It was as simple as that.

First Christian Message

The first Christian message made no reference to economics, but it was destined to refine the whole philosophy of economics. It never laid claim to being a philosophy, but it became the yardstick by which all philosophies are to be judged. It offered no political blueprint according to which governments should be organized, but it lifted up goals and ideals according to which all governments must be measured. It provided for no ritual, no legal reforms, no governmental party, and no political reforms. Yet it infused into life a new hope; into the thinking of men, a new moral sense; into the hearts of men, an entirely new aggregation of ideals.

If this were a scholarly study designed for the instruction of theologians, critics, and scientific students of the New Testament, the pages that follow would be studded with footnotes. But since they were prepared for plain people who seek only a faith in the midst of practical matters, such impedimenta have been omitted. The fact that the manuscript was read with meticulous care by accredited scholars before publication should provide some assurance that the following interpretations are trustworthy.

To understand Abraham Lincoln, the reader must know something of the social, economic, and political circumstances of the United States about midway in the Nineteenth Century. To understand Mahatma Gandhi, one must know something about the life of India at the close of the Nineteenth Century. To understand Wilfred Grenfell, it is necessary to understand Labrador at the beginning of the Twentieth Century. To understand Jesus of Nazareth it is quite necessary that the reader know something about Palestine and Galilee at the time that Tiberius Caesar ruled as the Emperor of Rome.

Let us set out, therefore, on a journey to Palestine and back to the first Christian Century that we may come to some understanding of the life and circumstances out of which the carpenter's son emerged. By doing so, we may hope to develop a new appreciation of the faith which he founded and by which the world is to be redeemed.

Chapter 2

His Home Town

*And he went and dwelt in a city called
Nazareth—Matt. 2:23*

IT IS just a bit unfortunate that the impression has gotten about that Nazareth—the town in which Jesus spent his boyhood, his youth, and most of his adult life—was a small Galilean village of no political or commercial importance. It is true that the town is nowhere mentioned in the Bible except in connection with the name of Jesus; but it is also true that, in both the King James and the Revised Standard versions of the New Testament, it is always spoken of as a “city” (Matt. 2:23; Luke 1:26, 39).

Nazareth

The chief trade route which connected the Sea of Galilee with the Mediterranean divided at a point only a few miles inland, and one of the well-travelled branches ran through Nazareth, linking it up with the trading centers of Galilee. Actually, Nazareth seems to have been one of the larger Palestinian towns at the time that Jesus engaged in his public ministry in Galilee.

Jerusalem

The largest city, of course, was Jerusalem, its population being probably 200,000—almost exactly that of the two sectors of the modern city. However, because of the throngs of pilgrims who crowded into it at all times of the year, attracted by the Temple services and the great feasts, it doubtless impressed the visitor as being a metropolis of at least a half million population.

With the exception of those periods when it lay devastated as a result of war, the city of David had been a tourist's mecca for a thousand years, as it is today. Outside its embattled walls in Jesus' day, however, no more than six Palestinian communities could properly have been called "cities"—Caesarea, Jericho, Tiberias, Capernaum, and Nazareth.

Caesarea

About midway between the modern city of Tel Aviv and the more ancient city of Haifa, the tourist of today will be shown the ruins of a very ancient Roman city, at least a third of whose walls lie submerged in the sea. Sometime during the later years of his reign (40-4 B.C.) Herod the Great rebuilt an old fortress known as Strato's Tower and gave the new community the name of Caesarea, in honor of the emperor who had sponsored him. When Rome took over the political administration of Judea, following Herod's death, the city was made the headquarters of the various procurators; and from it they ruled the country.

Pilate, the procurator who presided over the trial and ordered the execution of Jesus, maintained military headquarters in Jerusalem, but he administered the political and economic life of the nation from the coastal town. Herod had spent a full twelve years in rebuilding the city; and it was a glittering capital, thoroughly pagan, and the actual capital of Judea. It is difficult to estimate just how large it may have been, for much of it was destroyed by an earthquake and the ruins are under water. But, in any event, no Jew ever set foot inside its walls if he could avoid doing so; and it never figured in the nation's social, cultural, or religious life.

Jericho

The city of Jericho, located a short distance west of the River Jordan, was one of the oldest communities in Palestine. Modern archaeological finds indicate that when Joshua invested it about the year 1200 B.C. (Joshua 6-7) it was already an ancient city. Archaeologists generally believe that some kind of settlement was established on the site at least a thousand years earlier. The walls that are reported to have collapsed at the sound of Hebrew trumpets rested upon foundations already hundreds of years old.

In Jesus' day, when the diminutive Zacchaeus served as the local tax-gatherer for the Romans (Luke 19:2-10), a very considerable traffic passed through Jericho, coming from the east and headed for Egypt. The Jordan valley was—and continued to be—extremely fertile; and large quantities of grain and dried fruits were shipped out of the country by way of the trade routes that passed through Jericho. The little tax-collector's responsibilities were, therefore, considerable.

At the edge of the modern city, and close by the accumulated ruins of ancient Jericho, there is a copious spring, the waters from which, in Herod's day, were believed to have curative powers. As a consequence, the aging king built elaborate baths for the use of the king's household, he being a sick man. In addition, he constructed a theater, citadels, and a royal palace, the whole giving Jericho the appearance of being a lavish stronghold.

No statistics have come down to us upon the basis of which it is possible to make any exact estimate concerning Jericho's population in Jesus' day; but, to judge from the ruins which have been uncovered during the last fifty years, it can hardly have numbered more than 10,000 inhabitants in normal times, although several thousand more may have appeared upon its streets when the king was in residence there. Generally speaking, it was a border town with a conglomerate population, which exercised little or no influence on Jewish thought or religion.

John the Baptist seems to have avoided the town altogether, although it could not have been more than a few miles removed from the desert where he held forth with his message of judgment and his call for repentance.

So far as the New Testament records furnish any information, it appears that Jesus visited the city on only two occasions (Mark 10:46-52; Luke 19:1-10). It is highly probable, however, that he passed through it on other occasions; for it was the custom of most Galileans to follow the route along the east bank of the Jordan in order to avoid the necessity of passing through Samaria en route to Jerusalem. We may assume, therefore, that he was at least somewhat familiar with the community as a market and stopping place; but, for the purposes of this study, we can dismiss the town from any further consideration.

Herod Antipas

Upon the death of Herod the Great, in the year 4 A.D., Herod Antipas, his second son, was assigned the responsibility of governing the two northern provinces of Palestine—Galilee and Perea. This arrangement had been provided for by the dying father; but it had to be validated by Tiberias Caesar, the reigning emperor.

Immediately upon receiving the confirmation of his claim to the throne, Herod Antipas installed himself as king in the city of Sepphoris, from which he reigned through a period of years. It was a hill city of considerable importance lying about eight miles west of the Sea of Galilee atop a commanding hill.

In an effort to compliment his overlord, to whom he was deeply indebted, however, and to provide himself with a fitting capital from which to govern his newly created kingdom, he began the construction of an entirely new city at a point about midway along the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was to be in every way a magnificent tribute to the Emperor and was to bear his name. The site was chosen for the reason, among others, that a series of mineral springs poured a tide of scalding hot water into the lake at this point; and to these the people had come for years in the belief that the waters held healing powers. To this day they enjoy the high esteem of all the area, and the resort hotels which have grown up about them do a brisk business.

Tiberias

The city of Tiberias was essentially a Roman town from the start in spite of the fact that it was the capital of a Jewish province. Syrians and other pagans flocked to it in great numbers for political reasons. Roman games furnished lusty entertainment for the public. Diplomatic deputations appeared upon its streets with great frequency.

There was a flash and a dash about the town both because it was new and because it was the capital. But no self-respecting Jew ever set foot inside it because it was built on the site of an ancient cemetery. To this day the tourist will notice a wide area against the western hills completely bare of all construction because it is believed to be the burying grounds of several thousand persons dead now for hundreds of years. It is interesting to note that, though Antipas was Jesus' king from the time Jesus was two years of age until the day of his death, and though Tiberias was the provincial capital, Jesus is not known to have ever set his foot upon one of its streets.

Rebellion

From the moment that Herod Antipas removed from Sepphoris the town became a hotbed of revolution and discontent. Fanatics, patriots, revolutionaries, rebels, and many a vicious character appeared upon its streets, agitating and fomenting trouble.

Among the important buildings left behind was the arsenal, which was stored with a huge supply of arms and military supplies of one sort and another. In the midst of a particularly wild period, a band of radicals broke into this arsenal, equipped a de-

terminated mob with arms, and took possession of the town. But they were no match for the disciplined and well-equipped Roman soldiers, and within a few days order had been restored. But several thousand of the rebels were taken captive, and these were crucified on a colonnade of crosses raised on either side of the highway that led out of the city toward the west. Occurring as it did about the time that Jesus was ten years of age, this ghastly business must have produced a profound impression on his boyish mind. When, twenty years or more later, he talked about crosses and predicted that he would die on one, he was indulging in no literary figure of speech. It is even possible that he may have seen with his own eyes the avenue of death as it stretched across the countryside for a distance of more than three miles, lined on either side with grisly reminders of horrible deaths.

Importance of Capernaum

The location of Capernaum was unique, and from both a commercial and military standpoint it was highly strategic. The famous *Via Maris*, one of the most heavily traveled trade routes in the ancient world—one which carried perhaps as much as seventy-five per cent of all the traffic between Asia and Africa—ran directly down its Main Street.

Although national boundary lines were usually a bit fuzzy, the authority of Rome came to a definite limit at a point only a short distance northeast of the town, which made Capernaum a Port of Entry. As they came down from the north and east, hundreds of caravans, large and small, paid customs duties at the Capernaum seat of customs. This created an enormous interest in the city on the part of every Caesar, for it was probably true that the publican in charge of collecting the taxes handled more money than any other officer in the employ of the Empire. Even a single week's disturbance of business could cost Caesar thousands of dollars in lost revenues.

Another factor which lent color and character to Capernaum was the fish business. The city stood toward the upper end of the Sea of Galilee, which swarmed with fresh-water fish (as it does today), considered everywhere to be a great delicacy.

Three miles away on the western shore of the lake, there was located the village of Magdala, a small community engaged in the business of fishing, fish-packing, and ship building. Here the catches were cured, salted, and packed for the markets in Rome, Athens, Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica, and other northern and western Mediterranean centers.

On almost any business day trains of donkeys might have been seen wending their deliberate way down Capernaum's Main

Street en route to the ports of Haifa, Acre, and Tyre, where the great reed hampers were loaded on small sailing vessels bound for their various destinations. As a result of the incoming and outgoing caravans, the shipments of fish, and the normal traffic of a city of 10,000, Capernaum gave the impression of being a bustling town, full of enterprise and energy.

Jesus and Capernaum

At the very outset of his public ministry Jesus became involved in an extremely unpleasant experience with the people of his home town of Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30), as a result of which he removed from the city and established his headquarters in Capernaum (Luke 4:31). There are those who think the entire family followed him, but of that there is no positive proof. But certainly from among the men of Capernaum he chose the majority of his disciples. No other community, with the single exception of Jerusalem, ever saw as much of him, or heard so much from him, as did the small metropolis at the head of the Sea of Galilee.

The city of Nazareth, from which he removed as a result of the riot, was a rural town. In spite of the fact that it was built on the side and top of a sizable hill, it was hidden away from the sight of Tiberias. This gave it an air of detachment. A riot might occur in the Nazareth synagogue; and Herod Antipas might not hear of it for days, or perhaps even for weeks thereafter. But nothing of importance could happen in Capernaum without the tetrarch's knowing about it within the matter of hours, for the city lay on a curve of a lake in full view of the docks in Tiberias, and smoke signals could have unleashed Herod's police within a matter of minutes. It is quite possible that Herod never heard of Jesus until after he removed to Capernaum. Indeed, when the carpenter's son began to attract public attention, the tetrarch actually suspected that he was John the Baptist come back to life (Matt. 14:2).

Tiberias was a politician's town—urbane, garish, pagan, and Roman. Capernaum was a tradesman's town—hurried, energetic, cosmopolitan, colorful, and tolerant. But Nazareth was a city of homes, neighbors, and humble townsmen—a city quite content to go its way unruffled and undisturbed. Yet there was one additional characteristic that deserves our attention. It was a religious center.

The services at the Temple in Jerusalem were performed by an army of priests, these being divided into a series of twenty-four "courses" (Luke 1:5-9). Each course was required to spend two weeks at the Temple in the discharge of its duties; but thereafter, for the remainder of a six-month period, the individual priests

were at liberty to reside where they might please. If they were on hand at the appointed time to render their service, that was all the Temple required of them.

Each course was expected, however, to assemble at a "priest center" in anticipation of their term of service and to proceed as a body to the Temple in Jerusalem. Any who were physically unable to make the journey were expected to tarry at the point of assembly and spend the time in prayer and fasting.

Nazareth a "Priest Center"

The city of Nazareth was one of the "priest centers," and to it the priests responsible for the administration of a certain course gathered and planned their journey to the Temple. Some of them may have actually lived in Nazareth; others must have lived in other Galilean communities. But, at the appointed time, they all bore down on Nazareth; and, for the brief period of a day or two, twice a year, they crowded in upon the streets of the hill town.

It is impossible to know how many of them there may have been; but, in view of the large number required for manning the Temple services, it is easy to believe that there may have been as many as three or four hundred of them on the streets of Nazareth by the time they were ready to take their departure. Such a numerous company, all arrayed in their priestly robes, could not have failed to make a profound impression on a growing boy; for Nazareth was a town that did not know many excitements.

The modern city of Nazareth is enjoying a feverish growth, with factories and smart apartment buildings springing up all around its perimeter. The Israeli government is making it one of the great trading centers of the north. The population figures usually given out may be somewhat enthusiastic, but one can easily believe that as many as 30,000 people now call it their home town.

In spite of the new textile mills, the chocolate factory, and other industries, the community's greatest single economic asset is the tide of tourists who tread its streets every day of the year, spending their money in the curio shops, eating at the local restaurants, hiring the local taxi-drivers and guides, visiting Mary's Well and the Church of the Synagogues where, so it is said, there is to be seen the identical schoolroom in which the carpenter's son sat as a boy, studying under the direction of the old rabbi who head-mastered the school. The actual historical proofs may be a bit dubious in some cases, but the atmosphere is authentic.

Reflected Glory

The town has never been a provincial capital, nor a military post. It has never produced a prophet, no historic battle has ever been waged against its walls, and no heroic feats have been credited to its sons. No university has arisen within its walls to attract the attention of the learned of the world. But it has survived the centuries, saved by the carpenter's son it once rejected.

Of the bustling city of Capernaum, nothing whatever remains except the ruins of an old synagogue which dates back to the Second Century A.D. and which probably stands on the site of a much earlier house of worship that was presented to the people of the town by a petty Roman officer who seems to have enjoyed the goodwill of the Galileans (Luke 7:1-5). This was something quite unusual in itself, especially in Galilee where hatred of the Romans was virulent and sometimes vicious.

At a distance of a few hundred feet from the ancient house of worship the tourist will be shown the remains of a mosaic floor which, it is said, was a part of the house occupied by a fisherman's family who were friends of Jesus (Mark 1:29). Aside from these two relics nothing remains today of the thriving city of Capernaum which Jesus knew—a grim fulfillment of the doom the carpenter's son once predicted (Matt. 11:23; Luke 10:15).

Simple Life

Life in Nazareth on the day the Holy Family is reputed to have returned there was relatively simple. The social, educational, and religious interests of the city all centered about the synagogue, which served the functions of school, church, and community center. The local rabbi was the superintendent of the school and also the general director of the long list of adult activities which were carried on within its precincts throughout the week.

On the sabbath day Joseph's family attended the worship services in the synagogue; and the boy Jesus undoubtedly sat through many a tedious exposition of Old Testament scriptures while a local layman, or some visiting celebrity, expounded his views. The service was not always inspiring, and whatever music there was could hardly have been called "good." Although the rabbi may have preached occasionally, it happened more commonly that a layman was invited to preach, and often without warning. It is easy to imagine the results. But Jesus always went to church (Luke 4:16).

During the weekdays, between the sabbaths, the various halls of the synagogue resounded to the debates of the elders, to the discussions of the adult groups, and to the lectures delivered by

visiting teachers who passed that way and gave promise of having something to say. Community councils were held within its halls, local issues were aired and decided, and the town's authorities used it as a meeting place wherein to transact whatever official business the city might have from time to time.

In such a town Jesus grew up to manhood as the carpenter's son, and no one ever guessed what manner of man he was destined to become. He forever suffered from the disadvantage of being one of the "home town boys"—a prophet without honor in his own country and his own house (Matt. 13:57).

Chapter 3

The Carpenter of Nazareth

"Is not this the carpenter's son?"—Matt. 13:55

ONE OF THE TITLES most commonly assigned to Jesus by modern writers and speakers is "the carpenter." It is derived from two widely separated scriptural references. In Matthew 13:55 we read that his Nazareth neighbors, mystified by the strange things he was saying and doing, exclaimed: "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son?" In Mark 6:3 we read a slightly different form of the same question: "Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? What mighty works are wrought by his hands! Is not this the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?"

Nature of the Carpenter's Work

It appears that he was commonly known among the people of Nazareth as Joseph's son (Matt. 13:55; Luke 3:23), and there can be no question about the occupation of the head of the

household. It is, however, important that we should know the exact meaning of the words employed.

The Greek word *téktwn* which appears in the Gospel of Matthew, and which identifies Joseph's craft as being that of a "carpenter," did not convey to the ancient Galilean precisely the same meaning it conveys to the modern reader.

The buildings in Palestine, both those used for domestic purposes and those dedicated to public functions, were, for the most part, constructed of stone and mud. Cement, as modernly employed, was unknown.

Stone walls were built by fitting uncut stones together more or less regularly, with mud and clay applied as an outer coating of rough plaster, the whole structure being whitewashed, perhaps. Such wood as was employed consisted of heavy timbers which served as lintels over doorways and window openings, or as support for the roof, which was sometimes thatched and at other times covered with a layer of reeds overlaid with mud and slightly sloped to facilitate drainage.

The size of all rooms was limited to the length of the logs available for constructing the roofs. The doors and windows which might be required were made of rough boards sawn or hewn out of great logs.

There were no such highly specialized crafts in the building business as those with which the modern builder is familiar. A "carpenter" undertook the responsibility of constructing a building from the ground up, including the stonework, woodwork, roofing, drainage, and any engineering that might be necessary. In most cases, he was apt to be responsible also for assembling the materials—wood and stone—that were to be used, this part of the work taking him to the forests and quarries to supervise the efforts of the common laborers.

Joseph's Position

A "carpenter" such as Joseph was might be assisted by a considerable number of workers who laid the stone in place, mixed the mud plaster, or lifted the heavy beams. But, as "the carpenter" in charge of the construction, he was expected to be, himself, a master of every type of labor required, capable of giving expert direction to the efforts of any unskilled workers who might be employed in the enterprise.

There were no "jurisdictions," unions, time-keepers, work quotas, or collective bargaining. There might be occasions when a group of laborers would present a collective complaint (Matt. 20:1-15), but any settlement of a controversy rested entirely with the judgment and inclination of the employer.

It may be stretching the point somewhat, but the fact must

not be overlooked that Joseph is referred to as *the* carpenter, as though he may have enjoyed some distinction as such. In view of the fact that the Palestinian houses were built very solidly and that each individual householder was usually capable of making all ordinary repairs, the amount of new construction going on at any one time must have been somewhat limited in a community no larger than Nazareth. It is quite possible that Joseph may have been the only man in the town who was trained to build a house from the ground up.

As is to be described a little later, Jesus became the manager of the building business upon the death of Joseph; and, in that position, he must have acceded to the respect which the head of the household enjoyed at the hands of the community. At least we know that, upon the occasion of his death, he was wearing a robe that was woven without a seam (John 19:23). This was a garment worn only by those who enjoyed a favorable economic status in their home towns.

From the scattered bits of evidence, therefore, it seems safe to assume that Joseph was a man of some prominence in Nazareth and that his household enjoyed at least some small measure of the comforts and good things of life. He apparently occupied something of the status of a small town building commissioner.

The Nazareth Family

A persistent tradition has it that the head of the Nazareth household died when Jesus was about fifteen or sixteen years old. At least there is no more mention of Joseph following the brief reference to the fact that he took his little family to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years of age.

The purpose of the journey was twofold. First of all, the family was a devout one; and the annual visit to the Temple on the occasion of the great religious Feast of the Passover was a fixed habit (Luke 2:41). In the second place, at the age of twelve a Jewish boy was to be enrolled as a "man in Israel." This was done in a ceremony at the Temple.

Following this incident, we never hear of Joseph again. The tradition of his death gains additional credence from the fact that, in Mark's Gospel, Jesus is referred to as "the son of Mary," a reference that would be quite natural if Mary happened to be the sole survivor of the original couple.

What occasioned his death, we do not know. The only thing of which we can be absolutely sure is that Joseph drops completely out of sight so far as the New Testament record is concerned, bequeathing to Jesus the friendly title, "the carpenter's son."

The New Testament says quite plainly that there were other

children in the family (Matt. 13:55-56). At this point, however, Protestants and Roman Catholic historians diverge quite sharply.

Those of the latter group declare that the sons and daughters mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew were, in reality, children of Joseph by an earlier marriage. But there is no hint whatever in the New Testament that supports this belief. The theory is supported only by evidence entirely outside the Christian scriptures.

Protestant opinion is unanimous in saying that the four sons and the unnumbered daughters were children of Joseph and Mary and must all have been younger than Jesus. It is impossible to go into the matter at any length in the brief space available in this study; but the present writer is convinced that the single statement in the New Testament is to be taken at its face value and that we are to think of Jesus as the oldest son in the family. We must never forget, however, that, whichever opinion is historically correct, Jesus grew up as a member of a family that included at least six other young people, and perhaps more.

Intellectual Background

Dr. Edgar A. Goodspeed, one of the world's great New Testament scholars, conducted an intensive investigation in the field some years ago and came to the conclusion (based on a surprising amount of evidence) that an impressive amount of reading matter must have been available to Jesus in the city of Nazareth.

There was, of course, the Great Book of the Law which was a part of the standard equipment of all well-operated synagogues. Then there must have been rolls containing the sermons of the prophets, psalms, and other writings of Jewish religious leaders. In addition to this material which has come down to us in our Old Testament, the Jews of the First Century were reading numerous religious writings, some few of which narrowly escaped being incorporated into the Old Testament. Concerning the "inspiration" of some of them there was a lively debate going on about the time Jesus was engaged in the carpentering business in Nazareth, and he could hardly have failed to be informed concerning the contentions of the authorities relative to their respective merits. The canon was not actually closed until the year A.D. 90, on the occasion of the assembling of the Council of Jamnia, which means that many of them could have been highly esteemed in Nazareth without anyone being cast out of the synagogue because of his belief in them. As a matter of fact, some of them were better known and may have been more frequently quoted by devout people such as Joseph and Mary than some of the writings which were finally fixed in the canon. In many respects their spiritual and moral value was very real. It

can almost certainly be said that at least some few of them were to be found in Nazareth, for the fact that the town was a "priest center" would suggest that there would be much interest in such writings among at least a few of the citizens of the community.

Because Joseph was a devout man, and because he seems to have been at least modestly prosperous, it is not inconceivable that at least a few such books may have been among the treasures in the carpenter's household. This cannot be affirmed to have been the case, of course; but, certainly, Jesus betrayed a familiarity with many of the Old Testament writings, and occasional references in his preaching can be matched up with comments from the books which missed getting into the Old Testament.

An Interesting Situation

If the tradition concerning Joseph's death is to be credited, and this writer thinks it should be, then we have an extremely interesting situation to consider. At the age of twelve Jesus was enrolled as a man in Israel (Luke 2:41-52). Thereafter his word was accepted as a witness in a court of law, he was legally bound by any contract he might make, he was responsible for any debts he might incur, and he might have been permitted to express opinions in the councils of the synagogue if he had so desired. At the age of sixteen it became his duty to assume the responsibilities which had hitherto fallen upon the shoulders of Joseph as the head of the household and as "the carpenter of Nazareth."

Perhaps we should comment on the fact that the theologians and the historians have never properly exploited the paternal influence that pervaded the Nazareth household over which Joseph presided. Interest, for the most part, has centered in Mary, the mother of Jesus. But if one is to judge by the scattered items of information that have come down to us, Joseph must have been a rather remarkable man in his own right. He was a "just" man, which means that he was thoroughly honorable (Matt. 1:19). According to the characterization provided for us by the Gospel of Matthew, he was chivalrous, sensitive, courageous, and thoroughly decent. At any rate, when Jesus began to cast about in his mind for a descriptive name to apply to God, he used the same word he had always used in addressing Joseph—*Father!* It is inconceivable that he would have employed a term so intimate if Joseph had not been admirable, exemplary, and splendid.

Chapter 4

The Carpenter Shop

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up"—Luke 4:16

THE MANAGEMENT of the Nazareth carpentering business must have been a serious responsibility, and the shoulders of any son—even the most precocious—are still narrow at the age of sixteen. The business must, therefore, have been something in which Mary and Jesus shared. This presumption gains some weight from the fact that he was spoken of as "Mary's son" by his neighbors in Nazareth when he was thirty years of age (Mark 6:3).

Great Responsibilities

Christian artists, in the opinion of this writer, have overlooked a thrilling opportunity in never having portrayed Jesus and Mary, his mother, bending low over the account books of the carpenter shop, late at night when the other members of the household were safely in bed and asleep. The two of them must have faced some serious problems together, for bills have a way

of piling up; and careful management calls for careful collections of accounts.

The financial management of the business was not the only load imposed on Jesus. Anyone familiar with the construction methods of the Near East knows that some of the stones and timbers of which even the humblest structures were built represented a staggering load for a youth of sixteen, even though he may have been assisted by young brothers. There must have been those occasional labors for which the strength of even the strongest men was required. There must have been occasions, then, when Jesus had to employ hired helpers.

Jesus as Employer

There is something intriguing in the thought of Jesus as an employer. The possibility of his sustaining such a relationship with other men has never been considered with sufficient care by New Testament scholars. Yet a study of Jesus' parables suggests—in at least one instance, namely, the story of the complaining workers (Matt. 20:1-5)—the viewpoint of an employer.

The argument cannot be pressed too far, of course; but it will repay the reader to go through the Sermon on the Mount, reading it as if it were preached by one who was accustomed to hiring workers and directing them in their labors.

There is an additional idea to be considered in this same connection. In managing the affairs of the carpenter shop, Jesus must have been confronted on occasions with the problem of meeting the payroll and paying for building supplies when funds were low. Likewise, there may have been some bitter experience with a customer which suggested the comment about sitting down first to discover whether or not funds are available to complete a contract once it has been begun (Luke 14:28). The parable may have been the outgrowth of something that was, for Jesus, a painful experience.

There are numerous indications in the Gospels which suggest that Jesus had been trained to watch the corners of the expense account. On at least two occasions he charged his disciples to gather up the scraps of food after a multitude had eaten that nothing might be wasted (Matt. 14:20; 15:37). There may have been a family experience in the background of the story of the man who besought his neighbor to lend him bread with which to feed an unexpected guest (Luke 11:5-8) who had arrived in the night. Quite evidently, nothing was wasted inside the household of the Nazareth carpenter.

In the light of all the foregoing it will repay the reader to go back and read again Mary's *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55). It is true, of course, that eminent scholars are of the opinion that the

hymn as we have it in our New Testament represents the form in which it was sung by the First Century Christian congregations. But even so, the phrases which speak of the "low estate of his handmaiden" and of the rich who were "sent empty away" hint—at least faintly—that Jesus' mother may have lived perilously near the line of actual want at some period of her life. As the wife of Joseph, and as the mother of the manager of the Nazareth carpentering business, she doubtless knew the necessity of economizing.

As a growing boy, Jesus was held in high regard in Nazareth (Luke 2:52), but there is no record of his occupying any post of authority in the city when he came to manhood. Sometime after he had been acclaimed by the outside world, he was invited to occupy the pulpit of the Nazareth synagogue one Sabbath; and the wisdom he displayed on that occasion amazed his old-time neighbors and friends (John 7:15). But some of the things he said, and some of the things he claimed for himself, infuriated the leaders of the community, with the result that the meeting broke up in wild confusion. Because of the riot with which the service ended, Jesus removed to Capernaum; and, so far as is known, he never returned to the town. We know, at least, that no townsman of Nazareth ever became one of his intimate disciples. It was a case of another prophet without honor in his own home town.

Title of Respect

Toward the close of his public ministry Jesus came to be addressed on numerous occasions as "Rabbi." This was one of the most honored titles he could bear as well as one of the most respectful terms that could be applied to him. Interestingly enough, in almost every instance when he was addressed thus it was by some learned person. The word carried with it an element of intellectual respect, not entirely unlike that which causes a modern man of affairs to address a learned man as "Doctor."

It is highly significant that the proprietor of the Nazareth carpentering business should have been so honored by learned men in Jerusalem (John 3:2). There is further significance in the fact that a rich man from a Jerusalem suburb offered the use of his own newly excavated tomb for the accommodation of Jesus' body following his crucifixion (Matt. 27:57-60). Even though social lines were not too tightly drawn in Jerusalem, it was a gesture of profound significance when Joseph of Arimathea played host to the Nazareth carpenter's lifeless body.

Toiling World and Tempered Mind

Any informed reading of the New Testament and of the teachings of Jesus reveals the Christian Gospel as having been born of a toiling world and a tempered mind. The Sermon on the Mount was not prepared in the quiet seclusion of a comfortable library, with books piled high all about. Instead, it was hammered out in a carpenter's shop. It does not breathe the calm of a cloister; there is just the suggestion of the odor of sweat about it. One can almost hear the sound of a hammer or a saw in some of its paragraphs.

It is impossible to understand any man apart from the times in which he lived. Savanarola, Luther, Charles Kingsley, Gladstone, Lincoln, Lee, Grenfell, Schweitzer, Niemoeller—these might have appeared as entirely different men in a generation other than the one in which each came. All must be interpreted in terms of the circumstances out of which they rose and of the facts in the midst of which they lived.

There can be no real understanding of Jesus, therefore, without an occasional return to the carpenter shop of Nazareth.

Chapter 5

The Carpenter's Family

"Behold thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak to thee"—Matt. 12:47

IN ATTEMPTING to describe the Nazareth carpenter's family we are, admittedly, dealing with one of the most difficult problems in all the New Testament. The problem is made especially baffling both because of the limited amount of dependable historical data at our disposal and because of the vast amount of tradition and legend which must be cleared away before we can establish ourselves on any solid base of fact.

Fantasies about Mary

It is probably true that more fantasies have gathered about the mother of the Nazareth household than about any other individual who ever lived. Very much of this is due to the exalted respect in which she has been held by the Christian Church and by the confidence which she inspires as a result of the fact that she became the mother of Jesus.

That she was a real flesh-and-blood person and that her daily life seems to have been that of the average Galilean housewife of the time complicates the problem for the historian because he is under the necessity of separating fact from fiction with little more than his own reverent judgment to guide him.

First of all, we are compelled to admit that, so far as the New Testament record is concerned, we know nothing whatever about Mary's parentage. There is a belief, generally accepted by Roman Catholic historians, to the effect that her mother's name was Anna and her father's name was Joachin. In view of the fact that there is no contradictory tradition, this opinion can probably be accepted. But, concerning the place of her birth, the social circumstances in the midst of which she lived, her education, or her age at the time of her marriage, we have no exact knowledge.

That Joseph, her husband, was considerably older than she is not improbable. Both were of the tribe of Judah, as is plainly recorded (Luke 1:32; 2:4). We know that she had at least one sister (John 19:25) and that, during the latter part of the year 5 B.C., she was living in Nazareth. There are those who think she was making her home with her sister, but of that there is no authentic proof.

Mary was related in some way (possibly through Joseph) to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist (Luke 1:36); but, in her first appearance on the pages of the New Testament, she is only betrothed to her husband. He has not yet taken her to his home. In the eyes of the Jewish law, however, she was his legal wife (Matt. 1:18-19). The family appears to have been in modest circumstances at the time of Jesus' birth, for the two turtle doves they offered at the Temple on that occasion was an offering commonly presented by the plain people from the country (Luke 2:24).

Mary's Family

Concerning the identity of the sister already mentioned (John 19:25) there is considerable difference of opinion; but the actual evidence seems to be weighted in favor of believing that she was an older woman named Salome and that she was married to a Galilean fisherman named Zebedee, who operated a fleet of fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee (Mark 1:20; Matt. 4:21).

If this was the case, Mary's sister would have been the mother of two sons named James and John, who became two of Jesus' most intimate and trusted friends (Luke 5:10). This intimate relationship between Mary and Salome would explain, in some part, the latter's presumption in soliciting special favors for her sons (Matt. 20:20-28)—an appeal that angered the other disciples, embarrassed Jesus, and put her boys on a bad spot. It might also

throw light on the suggestion that she contributed to the travel expenses of Jesus and his disciples as they went about among the villages and towns of Galilee (Mark 15:40-41).

Mary's Relation to Jesus' Ministry

From the time Jesus' public ministry began until the time of his final departure from this earth, Mary appears upon the scene in the historical record on only four occasions: (1) at a marriage feast (John 2) held in a village near Nazareth; (2) when she tried to speak to him in the midst of one of his public meetings (Matt. 12:46; Mark 3:31; Luke 8:19); (3) at the scene of the crucifixion (Mark 15:47; John 19:25-27); and (4) at a gathering of friends following their last sight of Jesus (Acts 1:14).

Admitting that these scattered bits of evidence constitute a very inadequate body of data, we are forced to the conclusion that Jesus' mother contributed relatively little to his public ministry. Nowhere does Mary appear as her son's advisor in any perplexing situation. Nowhere does she come forward offering any word of comfort or assurance of confidence. Nowhere does she confide in her son any report concerning strange circumstances attending his birth. In one instance she does declare her complete confidence in his ability to handle an embarrassing situation (John 2:1-11); but in that instance her remarks are addressed to her own friends, and not to her son. On the occasion of his crucifixion she is represented as being present, but no word of any kind passed between them during that awful experience except the single directive that thereafter the beloved disciple was to be accepted as her son. In at least two of the cases (cf. 1 and 2 above) Jesus' words to his mother seem to carry with them an element of reproof.

In spite of the silences, the omissions, and the actual evidence, however, one has the feeling that Jesus was forever aware of his mother's confidence and support. His preaching as reported in the first three Gospels bears evidence of her influence, for again and again he employed little household incidents to illustrate his points. All in all, it is impossible to ignore Mary's influence—a force that must have provided him with courage on many occasions.

Something of his affection for his mother can be estimated by his attitude of respect for all womanhood. Throughout his entire public career he seems to have dealt generously, delicately, and sympathetically with all women and, in some cases, with great charity (Matt. 26:6-13). In such situations, Mary seems to move like a shadow in the background.

Other Members of Jesus' Family

Concerning the other members of the family the case was very different. Of his sisters we know nothing whatever, not even their names. Of the four brothers (Matt. 13:55), with the exception of James, we are almost equally ignorant. On one occasion they appeared at the edge of a crowd trying to persuade him to return home with them (Matt. 12:46). Quite evidently, they believed that he was overwrought, beside himself, or temporarily confused. During his lifetime they participated in his work in no way and may have actually disapproved. After his death, however, they seem to have taken a different attitude and to have joined the ranks of the Christians although, with the exception of James—who became the administrative head of the Church—none of them seem to have held any position of authority. In seeking rewarding friendships, Jesus was compelled to go outside his family circle.

The Roman Catholic View

An extremely interesting, and equally confusing, question emerges just at this point. The Roman Catholic Church professes to believe that the other sons and daughters in the Nazareth household were not actually Mary's children, but that they were offspring of Joseph by an earlier marriage. The debate in the matter has gone on since the close of the Third Century A.D., when Jerome, the great Christian Church father, declared his personal convictions in the case. Some part of the argument rests down upon the fact that the language of the times did not always draw a clear distinction between "brothers" and "cousins." But it is the belief of this writer that the New Testament reference in the case (Matt. 13:55) is to be accepted as meaning exactly what it says—that the four men (James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas) were Mary's sons and Jesus' younger brothers.

With the single exception of James, who became the head of the Jerusalem church, as has already been noted, the other three brothers seem to have been faceless men with little or no influence in the life of the infant Church. They were doubtless highly respected, and from time to time they may have thrown light on the meanings of some of the things Jesus had taught. But, on the basis of anything actually known, they were inconspicuous, quite without any personal following and without the ability or (perhaps) the interest to add anything to the life, the thought, or the work of the Church.

The Role of James

In the case of James, however, we find ourselves dealing with an altogether different matter. According to one of the Gospel

writers (John 7:5), there had been a time when none of his brothers had believed in Jesus. It had seemed incredible to them that one of their own household, with whom they had lived on the most intimate terms, could possibly be called of God. But James, the oldest of the quartet, seems to have been convinced of the importance of his brother's calling (probably by the resurrection) and was visited by the risen Jesus sometime during those amazing days following his burial (I Cor. 15:7). Within the space of a few years James became the titular head of the infant Church, his judgments and decisions carrying enormous authority throughout the movement (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18-25; Gal. 1:18, 19; 2:1-10). In his office as chief administrator he became known as "the Just." He was highly respected by all classes in Jerusalem. He seems to have been sufficiently loyal to the Jewish Law and customs to have escaped serious criticism at the hands of the Temple authorities, at least during his early years in office.

One of James' most important official actions as head of the Church was his admission of Paul, a converted Tarsus Jew, to the fellowship of the Jerusalem congregation. In this matter he acted on his own authority and quite independently of the accredited disciples (Acts 12:17; 15:13, 19; 21:18; Gal. 2:9).

If we were dependent upon the New Testament record alone, we would know nothing whatever of James' end; but Hegesippus, the earliest of the Church historians, who wrote about the middle of the Second Century, says he died a martyr of the faith. Thrown down from the Temple wall, he was stoned and had his brains dashed out with a fuller's club.

Such, then, is a general description of the humble family of which the founder of the Christian movement was a member. Without social distinction, political power, or any kind of wealth or religious prestige, the Nazareth family provided the domestic setting out of which Jesus came. It is possible to describe the household in at least some small detail, but no such description can explain the oldest son in the home whose life and words gave the household its immortality.

A generation or more ago, Elbert Hubbard said of a humble American family, one of whose members had proved to be a genius: "Ten of the children were plain barnyard fowls, *but one was an eagle!*"

Chapter 6

The Friends of the Carpenter's Son

*"Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature,
and in favor with God and man"—Luke 2:52*

AS A YOUNG LAD and youth in Nazareth, Jesus seems to have enjoyed a considerable popularity. As the manager of the carpenter shop, he must have maintained an excellent reputation for both workmanship and fair dealing; for, when the Temple hierarchy combed his record in search of damning evidence of any kind, no one came forward to charge him with either shoddy workmanship or unfair business practices. He quite evidently enjoyed the respect of Nazareth as a craftsman and as a businessman; and this is no small commentary on one who, at the age of sixteen, was compelled to assume the responsibilities of a more or less prominent citizen.

A Marvelous Record

For fourteen years Jesus dealt on intimate terms with the craftsmen of Nazareth. During that same period of time he had been under the necessity of paying bills, collecting accounts, ful-

filling contracts, purchasing materials, and meeting specifications. But when he presented himself before John the Baptist for baptism, his record was so clean that the voice from heaven declared, "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17).

In view of all the foregoing it is just a little surprising to note, as has already been mentioned, that no list of intimate friends includes any person from Nazareth. It is quite possible that this can be explained in terms of the riot in the Nazareth synagogue in which he became involved within a short space of time following his baptism at the hands of John the Baptist.

So far as is known, Jesus had never served as one of the elders of the Nazareth synagogue up to the time of launching his public ministry with his baptism. It was the custom of the synagogue authorities to call upon first one, and then another, of the local laymen to expound the scripture from the pulpit of the local synagogue. But so far as we know, no such invitation had ever been extended to Jesus. At any rate, the people were unprepared for the kind of sermon he delivered when the invitation finally came.

His First Sermon

The timing of that first sermon is of more than passing interest. Attracted by the reports of the Baptist's preaching, which filtered in to him in Nazareth, Jesus had journeyed down to the fords of the Jordan to hear John for himself. Convinced that the new movement was of God, he offered himself as a candidate for baptism, was accepted, and thereafter became one of a number of lay preachers who declaimed to the multitudes concerning "the end of the age" and the necessity of repentance.

Something about his preaching, his sermons, or his sincerity began to attract the attention of the crowds to the point that some of the older disciples of the Baptist grew jealous of Jesus' enthusiastic acceptance (John 4:1); and, to protect himself and the movement from controversy and partisanship, he withdrew from Judea and returned to Galilee and to Nazareth.

The news of his success as a preacher on the banks of the Jordan had preceded him to Nazareth, however, so that, when he appeared at the synagogue service the following Sabbath, he was immediately invited to preach. This he did, with results almost approaching a disaster. His assumption of authority, his expansive claims for his own message, and his forthright approach to the problem of the religious needs of the time amounted to a sensation (Luke 4:16-30).

A Conservative Community

Nazareth, perhaps for a variety of reasons, was a conservative community. It may have been a result of the influence of the priests who made it their rallying point. It may have been a part of its rural heritage. It may have been the reaction of a public made sensitive by isolation. Whatever the cause, Jesus' apparent friendliness for non-Jews had the effect of angering the elders of the synagogue to the point of frenzy; and the meeting broke up in wild disorder. Only by a hair's breadth did Jesus escape being lynched. As it was, he spirited himself out of the town; and, so far as the record goes, he never again set foot inside its borders, nor did he ever refer to it in any way.

Any community commits a terrible sin against itself when it silences the voice of God in the house of God. Jesus never condemned his old home town: he simply ignored it.

Nor did he, so far as we know, maintain any contact with any of Nazareth's citizens except those of his own household. There are those who think he removed his family to Capernaum, where they established themselves in an entirely new life (Matt. 4:13; Mark 2:1; John 2:12); but of this we cannot be quite sure. The only thing of which we can be certain is that, from that time forward, he used Capernaum as his base of operations.

A Different Atmosphere

In Capernaum Jesus found himself in an entirely different atmosphere. The constant stream of traders, merchants, caravans, and deputations had the effect of producing a cosmopolitan spirit. Fishermen who shipped their catches to far distant cities were apt to think in different terms. The Capernaum bankers, in correspondence with others of their profession in Athens, Alexandria, Corinth, Ephesus, Thessalonica, Antioch, and Rome, were compelled to develop something like an international viewpoint. Priests and rabbis who brushed elbows with men of other faiths were apt to think in different areas.

On almost any day of the year the streets of Capernaum swarmed with long trains of camels bearing huge bundles of rugs, tapestries, and silks. The market place became almost tumultuous at times as merchants and traders from Syria—and even as far away as China—bargained with shifty-eyed dealers from Egypt and from as far away as Ethiopia. Even to walk amid such a flotsam and jetsam was to feel a different interest in the issues of life.

For a variety of reasons, some of which will be described in a subsequent chapter, the Galileans were a yeasty lot—highly inflammable, restless, and rebellious. Toward Rome they were apt to be irreconcilable; toward the Temple hierarchy in Jerusalem

they were apt to be bitter and contemptuous. They despised those who disdained them, and they were constantly ready to revolt against those who exploited and threatened them. The claims of the ancient faith of Israel rested more or less lightly on their shoulders; for, being far removed from the Temple rituals and services, they found it easy to excuse themselves for ignoring the strict requirements of the Law.

Only a few miles north of Capernaum the caravans found themselves no longer in Galilee, if they were going in the direction of Damascus. The city was one of the most important ports of entry anywhere along the border of the Roman Empire. The customs post at the border was one of the most important offices of its kind.

Spirit of Revolt

Five miles east of Capernaum the land became a wilderness, with innumerable caves hidden away in the narrow canyons between the limestone ridges. These offered safe hide-aways for fanatical revolutionaries and fugitives from justice. The spirit of revolt was never far beneath the surface in Galilee; and Capernaum was a border town where almost anything could happen, and sometimes did.

The province of Galilee was of the utmost importance to Rome, for military reasons. Throughout at least five months of the year, the Mediterranean was almost impassable for the small craft then in use. The result was that the coastal highways carried the commerce, the military deputations, and the troop transports of the world. Across that narrow little bridgehead of land, no more than thirty miles wide, the most profitable commerce of the world flowed in an unending stream. At the same time the most important movements of troops occurred along those same highways.

It was of the utmost necessity, therefore, that the province of Galilee should be held under strict control, for it was the Achilles heel of the Roman Empire. A strong force of hard-riding Arabs, mounted on swift steeds, could cut the Roman Empire squarely in two. To forestall any such catastrophe, Rome kept a huge standing army within easy reach of Galilee (and that meant Capernaum) at all times. The town's streets were often clogged with Roman Legionnaires armed with stout shields and short swords. Rome permitted Herod to raise and arm a private army, but for no purpose more than that of a local militia. Its movements were at all times subject to review at the hands of the governor of Syria, from his capital in Damascus nearly two hundred miles north.

Many of the merchants and traders among the Capernaum

Jews found it highly profitable to trade with the thousands of Roman soldiers camped in a series of towns east of the Sea of Galilee, which were known collectively as "the Decapolis." They might not be permitted to eat pork themselves, but there was no law which forbade them raising swine and selling the meat to the Romans who esteemed pork to be a great delicacy. Since they were willing to pay a good price for it the business, among several others of equal dubiousness, proved highly profitable. On at least one occasion Jesus discovered it was risky procedure to interfere with the pig business, even if a demented man was healed of his dementia in the process (Mark 5:1-17).

Recruitment of Disciples

It was from among acquaintances and friends in Capernaum that Jesus recruited most of his disciples. They were alert men of the world who had grown up in an atmosphere of adventure, energy, independence, and unorthodoxy. There was a fine spirit of daring about them—a dedication to idealism which prompted them to sever any business connections they might have and set off down the highway with this fascinating teacher who had been a carpenter in Nazareth.

The oldest and most conspicuous individual in the group which was finally brought together was a leathery old fishing captain who, together with his brother, operated a business which netted the highly favored fresh water fish of the Sea of Galilee, salted them, and packed them ready for shipping to the European markets. The firm of Simon and Andrew seems to have been a rather prosperous organization, for the brothers owned a respectable town house known to all the city (Mark 1:29). Their investment in boats, nets, and saltern was evidently considerable; for, on one occasion, Simon, who came to be known as Peter, did not hesitate to remind Jesus that he and his brother had left *everything* when they had turned from fishing to following (Mark 1:20; 10:28).

International Relations

The bankers of Ephesus, and later of Corinth, in Greece, had worked out a system of letters of credit—not entirely unlike those in use by modern bankers—which facilitated the transfer of gold from one city to another without actually transporting the bullion.

As a consequence, the Galilean brothers must have had correspondents in almost every great port city of the Mediterranean. They would ship their fish by donkey train to some coastal town along the Mediterranean. The fish were packed in great reed hampers and carefully salted, consigned to fish dealers in perhaps

half a dozen cities. Upon receipt of the fish, the dealers would pay their local bankers and they, in turn, would send a letter of credit to the Capernaum bankers upon whom Simon and Andrew could draw for their payment.

It was a relatively simple system, and it sidestepped the hazards of the highwaymen who infested the trade routes. The very circumstances of the fishing business involved Simon and Andrew in international relations.

Among the fishing firms of northern Galilee was one headed by an old captain known as Zebedee who, together with his two sons—James and John—operated a fleet of boats. They seem to have had some kind of working arrangement with Simon and Andrew, the exact nature of which is unknown (Luke 5:10). It may have been some form of cooperative by which all pooled their catches, salted their fish in a common saltern, and shipped them in a common carrier.

Concerning such details we can have no more than a passing interest, but in certain personal affairs we have a great interest. Salome, Zebedee's wife, was a sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus. This means that she was Jesus' aunt; and Zebedee was his uncle, making James and John, the two sons, his cousins.

The New Testament is a bit niggardly in personal matters; but there is reason to believe that the family was at least modestly prosperous, for at least some part of the traveling expenses of Jesus and his disciples was furnished by Zebedee and his wife (Luke 23:49; 24:22; Matt. 20:20-28; Mark 10:36-38). This is more than a little interesting in view of the fact that there is no indication whatever that Jesus drew any part of his support from his own family for whose care and provision he had labored through so many years.

Commerce and Taxes

Mention has already been made of the fact that the customs house in Capernaum collected and transmitted to Rome enormous sums of money in the form of import duties. A single camel train, consisting of thirty heavily loaded animals (which was not unusual then, nor is it today), would have carried tens of thousands of dollars' worth of merchandise. When such an entourage arrived at the roadblock a little distance north of Capernaum, every bundle of rugs, tapestries, silks, and hand crafted material had to be taken down off the backs of the beasts, opened, and the contents appraised. A careful accounting of everything had to be made to Rome, for Caesar accepted no rough estimates.

If a dozen such caravans arrived from the north, and an equal number came in from the south, the total operation for the day would have required the services of a small army of clerks,

appraisers, bookkeepers, accountants, and roustabouts, all of whom were directed by the officer who sat at "the seat of the customs" (Matt. 9:9; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). Of necessity, this officer had to be a highly trained individual capable of rendering intelligent and intelligible accounts. Any man appointed to the post had to be, by the very necessities of the case, an executive of high order; for there was no more responsible financial post anywhere in the Near East.

The Romans were very astute in the matter of collecting taxes from subject peoples. If it were at all possible, they chose the tax collectors from among the local citizens, thus deflecting criticism from themselves and directing it at the collaborator.

The chief officer in Capernaum, who sat at "the receipt of the customs," was a rich Jew who went by the name of Matthew, or, at other times, Levi (Luke 5:27). The pay-roll for which he was responsible was huge, for many of his workers were highly skilled professional men.

According to the Roman custom, it was required that he put up a cash bond as a guarantee of honest accounting and prompt transmission of funds. In addition, he had to have a large working capital if he was to meet his pay-roll regularly. Only a rich man could have hoped to secure the appointment, and there have been those who have thought that Matthew must have been "almost a millionaire."

It was a matter of enormous interest, therefore, amounting to a sensation, when the chief customs collector announced his resignation and disclosed his plan for accompanying the Nazareth Carpenter on his preaching missions. The banquet he tendered to his long-time friends, at which he introduced Jesus to the business community (Luke 5:29), must have been an impressive occasion.

Disciples Representative

From the very start Simon seems to have been one of the carpenter's favorites. It may have been because he was the oldest of the group, because of his position as a business leader of the community, or because of some attractive quality of personality. At any rate, in the midst of a particularly serious conversation, Jesus said: "From this day on I'm going to call you Peter" (Matt. 16:18).

In its Greek form the nickname meant "the rock," and this characterization of the aging fisherman has stuck to him to this day. On another occasion he called his cousins—James and John—"sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17), which was doubtless an apt description of two noisy, lusty, adventurous youths who were the sons of a well-to-do fishing captain and who were accustomed to

desperate battles with a fickle inland sea. Underneath their rollicking bravado there was a lively ambition which was encouraged by their mother (Matt. 20:20-24)—a trait of enormous value when it is properly disciplined.

Simon (Peter) and Andrew, James and John—the four fishermen—represented the business interests of Capernaum. Matthew, the tax collector and chief customs officer, represented the official mind of Galilee. And there was at least one other—Simon, the Zealot—who represented an entirely different social and political group.

The exorbitant load of taxes laid upon the Galileans, both by the Romans and by the Temple hierarchy, had become in Jesus' time a source of violent discontent. As a result, the smallest extra irritant was capable of fanning the embers of anger into a furious flame; and any agitator who arose in protest, however unreasonable or violent he might be, could be sure of recruiting a following of bitter and resentful individuals.

It was for this reason that a radical party of revolutionaries had come into existence. They operated underground, for the most part; but they stood ready to add fuel to any flames of disorder that might develop anywhere. Their hatred of all things Roman was virulent and even vicious. By every conceivable means, they managed to keep up a running fire of controversy and outrage, with the result that they were always under suspicion if they were not actually being pursued. But always there were the caves in the wastes just a little distance away among the eastern hills.

Divergent Minds

Among these Zealots there was one, also named Simon, who became interested in the preaching of the carpenter from Nazareth and who was invited to become a member of the little band of intimate friends. One can easily imagine some of the arguments that must have gone on between Matthew, the rightist, and Simon, the leftist, when they were out of earshot of their Master. Not the least tribute that must be paid to the genius of the carpenter was the fact that he was able to persuade two men of such divergent minds to work together harmoniously on the same committee.

However, the spirit of revolt did not always express itself in violence. There was a numerous party known as Essenes, with representatives in all sections of Palestine, who had withdrawn completely from the Jerusalem system and had established a large monastery in the foothills just west of the Dead Sea. They believed the Temple hierarchy was hopelessly bad and quite without hope of reform. Therefore, they operated a lively evan-

gelistic campaign throughout the land, with missionaries going two by two into the country villages arguing, persuading, and seeking to convert Jews to a more "orthodox" Hebrew life.

In conjunction with their monastery they maintained what was, probably, the most impressive library in Palestine. In their own scriptorium they employed a group of skilled scribes in producing hundreds of books which were used as propaganda in their missionary enterprise.

A Great Discovery

In the year 1948 Dr. John C. Trevor, a young Methodist scholar attached to the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem, stumbled quite by accident upon an ancient scroll on which was written almost the entire book of Isaiah and which proved to be the oldest authentic piece of Old Testament scripture known. This, in turn, led to the discovery of the Essene Library, monastery, and burying ground, all of which has thrown a dazzling light on the political, social, and economic facts of the times in addition to the religious interests and activities.

There is at least some small reason to believe that John the Baptist may have been a student at the monastery for a brief period of time, and there is considerable reason to believe that Jesus himself may have copied some of the Essene methods of propaganda. At any rate he went along with them in sending his own disciples out two by two on occasions (Luke 10:1-12). So far as we know, however, no Essene ever became a member of Jesus' new movement.

Many scholarly treatises have been produced through the years, and hundreds of legends have gathered about the names of those individuals who composed the little band of disciples who first followed Jesus and became the seed of the Church. Some of these legends have been little less than fantastic, but back of others there have been occasional germs of truth. Enough has been suggested in this chapter, however, to indicate that those early Galilean Christians were an earthy and practical lot. Each one in his own way was an individual of power and importance. They were not always humble, nor were they always wise; but all were men of consequence in their own way, and each was endowed with a rare capacity for loyalty and devotion. The fact that, with but a single exception, they all died a violent death in defense of their faith means they left behind them an outstanding record for courage and conviction.

Characteristics of the Carpenter's Son

By all accounts the carpenter's son seems to have been a charming dinner guest, a stimulating conversationalist, and a

companion who could be disarmingly frank when it suited his purpose to be so. Up in front of a crowd, he was a convincing speaker, a skilled debater. As a visitor inside a home, he was both gracious and discerning (Luke 10:41), never violating the canons of good taste.

On all occasions, he was a man of splendid dignity; but he was also easily approachable. Little children were never afraid of him (Matt. 19:14).

Jesus' indignation in the presence of hypocrisy could be scalding (John 8:3-11); but, with the penitent, he was as tender and considerate as a young mother. Without condoning sin in any form, he conveyed the impression that he stood ready to open the gate to God for any evildoer who was penitent. For the weak and unmanned, he had nothing but pity and patience; for the self-righteous and pompous, he mingled ridicule and scorn (Luke 18:9-14).

It was said that the common people "heard him gladly" (Mark 12:37); but it could also have been said that the rich sought him out and that the highly placed appealed to him in the hour of their anxiety (Matt. 8:5). Men even crossed national and racial lines in search of him (John 12:20-22). The learned respected him and used their most respectful titles in addressing him (John 3:1-15). Leading citizens extended him dinner invitations (Luke 7:36). Outcasts took new hope in his presence (John 11:2). The appeal of the carpenter's son was universal.

The only doors closed to Jesus were those of the proud, the self-righteous, the impenitent, and the greedy. Through the portals, and into the lives, of such persons he was never allowed to pass.

Chapter 7

The Carpenter's Countrymen

"I will make you to become fishers of men"
—Mark 1:17

EVERY MAN'S LIFE and work must be evaluated in terms of the times in which he lived. They must be interpreted in the light of the moral standards which prevailed, the economic factors with which they had to contend, and the social circumstances by which they were surrounded.

Jesus was no exception to this rule. This makes it necessary for us to take a brief detour into the ancient history of the Jewish people.

Destruction of Jerusalem

In the year 722 B.C. the capital city of the northern Hebrew Kingdom fell to the Assyrians; and, in 586 B.C., Jerusalem was reduced to rubble by the Babylonians, thus bringing the southern kingdom to an inglorious end. About the year 400 B.C. a small party of returnees attempted to bring Judah back to life, but it was not until the times of Herod the Great (47-4 B.C.) that

the little Jewish state actually revived any part of its ancient glory.

In the meantime, the northern Palestinian provinces had been settled by a racial conglomerate which could be called "Jewish" only by the most violent stretching of the meaning of the name. According to an ancient Assyrian policy, the land which had been occupied by the people of Israel was filled up with deportees from other areas. The original deportation had ignored the ne'er-dowells, the shiftless, and the incompetent. The resulting population was, therefore, a mongrel crowd without racial pride or national consciousness.

Through a period of nearly six hundred years one conqueror after another bludgeoned his way across the east Mediterranean lands, and the area in the vicinity of the Sea of Galilee was repeatedly laid waste. About the only claim the Galileans of Jesus' day could make to Jewishness was the fact that they occupied territory which God had at one time delivered into the hand of the Hebrews. There were, of course, those occasional individuals like Mary and Joseph who could trace their descent back to reputable old Hebrew stock (Luke 2:4; 1:26); but, ethnically speaking, they were a rarity.

Determined Program

The Jews who came back from the Babylonian Exile, convinced that their nation's disaster had been a direct result of national apostasy, were determined to avoid any repetition of the tragedy. Therefore, they adopted stern measures in an effort to insulate themselves against all things pagan; and a determined program was adopted designed to prevent mixed marriages or any other infiltration of paganism. A proliferation of restrictions and requirements grew up about the Law and the Sabbath so that none save those within easy reach of Jerusalem were able to meet the requirements of strict orthodoxy.

This had the effect of discriminating against the Galileans, who lived at least a hundred miles away. When they were able to make occasional visits to the sacred altars, they found themselves despised by the self-righteous inhabitants of the capital. Indeed, they were called "*amharetz*," or what might be known today as "riff-raff." The result was that they answered contempt with bitter animosity.

No one knows, precisely, how the synagogue may have taken form among the Jews during the Babylonian Exile beyond the fact that, when the deportees returned to Judea, they brought it back with them as a fully organized and recognized religious institution. And with the institution came a professional group

known as "scribes," who may be described as "the ordained clergy."

A party of the especially devout among the laity came to be known as "the Pharisees," and in Jesus' day they were the loyal support upon which the scribes depended. While it was true that all Jews professed profound loyalty to the Temple, the day-by-day religious life and interest of the masses centered in their neighborhood synagogues, with the scribes and the Pharisees in control.

Jesus and the Pharisees

Because the New Testament reports numerous conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees the modern Christian is apt to hold the latter in general contempt; for, it must be confessed, the majority of those whom we meet on the pages of the New Testament were something less than admirable. Actually, however, the party represented the dedicated and devout segment of society, at least on the humbler levels. There were those individuals, of course, who were exactly what the Christian scriptures represent them as being—captious and irritating; but the party as a whole was the spiritual spinal column of Judaism. In estimating them as a class, we must not forget that some few, at least, became followers of Jesus (Acts 15:5).

An interesting fact appears just here. There could have been no more than an extremely small party of Pharisees in Galilee. So far as the New Testament record goes, there were none; but this seems unlikely. However, they were not the influential force in the northern province that they were in the region round about Jerusalem. To be a really good Pharisee one had to perform rites and obey rules which became impossible to all those who lived outside an easy access to the Holy City. The Galileans, therefore, lacked the spiritual leadership of the most devout group in the nation.

The Galileans

A second interesting fact concerning the Galileans had to do with the question of mixed blood, to which reference has already been made.

Because wars had wasted the land the family genealogies had been destroyed in large part; and those who, for one reason or another, found themselves under the necessity of establishing the line of their descent usually had to return to some Judean town or village where reliable records were available. This was the reason that Joseph and Mary had to go to Bethlehem on the eve of Jesus' birth (Luke 2:4).

The fact that Jesus was of the Davidic line marked him with a certain distinction among the mixed-blood Galileans and was

one of the important reasons why, on that memorable Sabbath, they escorted him into the city of Jerusalem to the accompaniment of frenzied shouting and singing.

It was commonly believed that the national deliverer would be of Davidic blood, and this confidence emboldened the farmers and shepherds of Galilee who awaited so impatiently the arrival of a champion to take up their cause against the Romans and the Temple overlords.

Judged by the historic facts, it appears that the demonstration which marked Jesus' entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of that last, tragic week was much more politically than religiously inspired (Mark 11:1-11). In a theocracy, the two are blended.

The Temple Hierarchy

As has already been explained, the Roman government made the local authorities responsible for the collection of local taxes. The revenues might be divided between the Empire and the local government; but, when the burden became oppressive, it was always the officials nearest at hand who had to bear the brunt of the opposition. In the case of the Jews in Jesus' day the situation was rendered acute because the civil authority had coagulated in the hands of a crafty and enormously rich old Sadducee named Annas.

In the year 7 A.D., very soon after Rome had disposed of the Herodian dynasty, Annas had contrived to get himself appointed to the office of High Priest. That the appointment came about as a result of the payment of a huge bribe is commonly conceded. When it was no longer possible for him to continue in office because of Jewish law, he had manipulated the appointment of his oldest son to the office. This continued with one son after another wearing the priestly crown until the list was exhausted, and it became necessary to induct a son-in-law into the priestly succession. On the day that Jesus was brought to trial this son-in-law, a pompous and helpless pawn, occupied the office; but old Annas "called the shots."

Civil government among the Jews was invested in the Temple hierarchy, and this meant in the hands of Annas. The Jerusalem Sanhedrin, consisting of about seventy members, acted in the capacity of a parliament; but it was actually only a little more than a legal fiction. Annas made the decisions, and there was no supreme court to which any appeal could be made.

Tax Abuses

Although the Pharisees represented the vast majority of the citizens, they were no more than a determined minority in the

Sanhedrin and could be outvoted at any time. Annas and Caesar saw to that.

The Sadducean Party consisted of the bankers, landowners, money lenders, and economic royalists of the nation. There were no more than about three thousand of them, and they all lived in Jerusalem. However, they were in possession of perhaps as much as seventy per cent of the wealth of the country; and, with a clear majority in the Sanhedrin, they were in a position to shift the burden of taxation from their own shoulders on to the bent backs of any who might be standing nearby. On most occasions the victims turned out to be Galileans.

On the day that Jesus cleansed the Temple, upsetting the cages of doves and the tables of the money changers, the bulk of the tax load of the land was being borne by that segment of the population least able to bear it. Year by year the abuses had been growing more and more pronounced. The humble and unlettered Galileans might not understand all the theological implications of the Temple regulations promulgated by Annas and his family, but they did know the effect of the tax laws.

Religiously speaking, the Sadducees had little interest in the synagogues. Their concern was chiefly with the Temple and its regulations of the revenue-producing measures connected with the Temple sacrifices. These they were usually able to disguise as "refinements of worship" while the common people fumed helplessly.

Double Taxation

Politically speaking, the Galileans were subjects of Herod Antipas. This meant that, in addition to any fees required of them by the Temple, they had to pay Herodian taxes. This amounted to double taxation. It was probably true that more actual cash was being squeezed out of Galilean purses than out of the pockets of any other Jews in the world.

To make matters worse, the Sadducean Party maintained an army of priests, numbering into the thousands, who served brief terms at the Temple altars and received for this service their support for the entire year. The office was hereditary so that all sons born of priestly fathers automatically became priests and were thereby assured of economic security for life. Some of them served no more than three or four weeks throughout the whole year. Thus, they represented a privileged class that could be relied upon to defend Temple policies and Temple decrees whenever such defense became necessary. They were a powerful force that could always be relied upon to support the administration.

The Temple System

The economic aspects of the Temple system were both simple and serious. The ancient Deuteronomic law defined the religious duties and payments of the people with meticulous care, but the enforcement of the ancient regulations was left to the Temple authorities. Even more important than the man who writes a law is the enforcement officer who administers the law; and, in the case of the Jews, the Sadducean Party had written into the system a series of requirements which produced enormous revenues.

The Law said, for example, that every man must present a sacrifice at the Temple altars every year as a symbol of penitence. In the case of the common people, it was specified that a pair of turtle doves would satisfy the requirement. But Annas and his cohorts interpreted this as meaning that the doves must be ceremonially "clean," and the old capitalist cornered the market by qualifying as the only person prepared to supply "clean" doves. Thereafter he could charge all that the traffic would bear.

By applying this principle to the total Temple operation, he and his family—together with their Sadducean supporters—collected the equivalent of millions upon millions of dollars every year. Meanwhile Annas piled up his private fortune, paid the annual bribe to Rome for the privilege of dictating the appointment of the High Priest, and maintained order with the help of the Roman police.

Everyone was at least dimly aware of the working of the system, although many may not have been familiar with the details. The result was that Annas and his family were hated with a bitterness that burned like acid on the nation's soul. There were communities, especially in Galilee, where even the mention of the old priest's name was greeted with prolonged hissing.

Explanation of Palm Sunday

It is not necessary to trace all the steps of their logic to discover how the Galileans came to their conclusion, but the simplest explanation of the Palm Sunday demonstration which accompanied Jesus' last entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21; Mark 11:1-11) is to be found in the realm of economics. *The Galileans believed that, at long last, a scion of the House of David had appeared to champion their cause! They had found a voice! They had produced a prophet! The establishment of his rule would see taxes reduced!* They had little interest in Messianic theology, but they had a mighty interest in taxes.

It is small wonder that they escorted him into the city with shouting and singing. Their day of deliverance had dawned.

They wrestled with no subtleties. They were tillers of the soil and tenders of the flocks. They had been ridiculed and robbed, trampled upon and betrayed. But, at last, they had a leader! Just how he had come, or by whom he had been commissioned, they did not try to explain. So far as they were concerned, the "end of the age had come."

Jesus must have been well aware of the restlessness of his fellow Galileans, but he took no part in planning any political revolution. Let no modern man assume an attitude of superiority as he considers the case of the carpenter's countrymen. We have had almost two thousand years in which to mull over the significance of the salvation which he offered to the world, and yet much of his meaning is still below the horizon of our thinking. There are even yet vast areas of life that prefer Barabbas to Christ.

Chapter 8

Galilean Politics, Economics, and Religion

*"Unless your righteousness exceeds that
of the scribes and Pharisees, you will
never enter the kingdom of heaven"*

—Matt. 5:20

IF WE ARE to come to any clear understanding of the ministry and message of the carpenter's son, it is necessary that we make some further excursion into the history of the Jews; for he contended not only against the evils of his day, but also against wrongs whose roots ran far back through the centuries. We are, therefore, in a position somewhat like that of a photographer who, if he is to get a correct representation of the scene, must go across the field to get another picture from another angle.

Critical Experience

The most critical experience of the Jewish people was also their most creative. In the year 586 B.C. the Babylonian king, Nebuchadrezzar, captured Jerusalem in a massive attack which left it a mass of smoking ruins. Thousands of the best citizens were carried off into captivity. It was a tragedy bemoaned by

every Jew, but in the end it proved to be the most regenerative episode in all the history of the nation.

Throughout a period of almost two hundred years courageous and enlightened individuals known as prophets had pleaded with the nation to establish justice and protect human rights. They had championed moral righteousness, social reform, and sex morality, but to no avail.

It is true that they were laymen without professional religious or political training, but they were also profound thinkers who were quite capable of diagnosing the social and economic ills from which the society of the day suffered. As a consequence, in most cases, they were accorded the bitter enmity of the priestly class as well as the contempt of the politicians. But they broke with all traditions in at least one respect: *They committed their convictions to writing.*

A Difficult Dilemma

When the little kingdom of Judah finally expired, the exiles found themselves confronted with one of the most difficult of dilemmas. For at least six hundred years the nation had been taught that it had been especially chosen by God as an instrument through which a divine purpose was to be accomplished. Prophets, priests, and kings had assured them that their God was invincible, that his protective power was all-sufficient, and that no matter what disasters might befall, they were destined to survive.

The Babylonian Exile therefore posed a problem of gigantic proportions. "Why has this calamity overtaken us?" the people demanded to know. "Has God failed, or have we? If we have sinned, wherein have we been guilty?"

There was but one possible explanation of the catastrophe which could satisfy the minds of men who had been reared in the tradition of Moses and who had been inoculated with the faith of the great lay prophets. *God had not failed. The Exile was only part of a vast plan designed to purify and sanctify the Jews and to make them custodians of the divine purpose for all mankind.* Under the stern disciplines of the Babylonian Exile, the Jews worked out the first great philosophy of history ever to have been conceived by the minds of men!

Problem of Massive Proportions

The doctrine that the nation's woes were a result of national sinning, however, posed a problem of massive proportions. *How had the nation sinned? Wherein had it missed the mind of God? How had it ignored the divine commands?*

Gradually, as the years multiplied and the thinking of the

people matured, it became rather commonly agreed that the fathers had sinned in at least three particulars: (1) They had neglected the observance of the Sabbath, (2) they had withheld the legal tithe, and (3) they had permitted paganism to seep in and to corrupt the ancient faith.

The religious leaders of the exiles therefore undertook to do two things: (1) They appealed to the people in behalf of a strict loyalty to "the Law" and (2) they undertook to provide a clear statement of what the Law approved and what it forbade.

No one has preserved for us any description of the scene, but one's imagination conjures up some thrills as he undertakes to reconstruct the events. The deportees had brought with them from Judah an extensive collection of writings which contained the sermons of the prophets, Temple records, official archives, priestly documents, and ancient legal codes of great sanctity and antiquity. Taken together, this made an impressive collection. Nothing quite like it existed anywhere else on earth. The personal sacrifices required of those who preserved this mass of material must have been tremendous.

Everything any man hoped to save out of his possessions in order to begin life anew in Babylon had to be transported hundreds of miles across one of the most barren wastes in the world. That men thus hard-pressed should contrive to find room for huge scrolls among the cooking vessels, blankets, greatcoats, and food supplies was evidence that they were individuals of a rare quality of mind and soul. As they abandoned blankets in order to make room for scrolls, they knew for a certainty that they would suffer through the bitter cold of desert nights.

It was over this mass of material that the leaders of the Jews pored during the deadly years of the Exile; and it was out of this same material that they compiled their "Great Book of the Law"—our modern Pentateuch.

Fanatical Devotion

Those who returned from Babylon expecting to rebuild the ancient Hebrew state soon began to exhibit a fanatical devotion to the Law. It was not enough, for example, that a man was not to be permitted to "labor" on the Sabbath day. The word had to be strictly defined; and, in the defining process, a list of thousands of forbidden activities was compiled. The same process operated in the case of tithing. In Jesus' day a devout Pharisee might have been seen counting the grains of pepper he sprinkled into his soup, with every tenth grain set aside as a tithe (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42). Every activity of life was listed as being either "right" or "wrong" until life became an impossible burden.

In the absence of political parties contending for political

power, Jewish society divided into rival religious factions which served all the functions and prejudices in that field. Nowhere were the lines more strictly drawn than among the Jews of Jesus' day.

Mention has already been made of the Pharisees and Sadducees. In addition, there were such other groups as the Zealots and the Essenes described in the previous chapter. Likewise, there were the Herodians—a party that favored the Herodian dynasty. The strife between all these was bitter, unending, unreasonable, and sometimes utterly unscrupulous. The motives were always the same—religion mixed with economics.

The Sadducees

Two characteristics identified the Sadducees. Their first concern was the protection of their special economic privileges. A small group of them, including Annas, the High Priest, and perhaps a dozen confederates, constituted themselves an informal and extra-legal organization just a little like a "kitchen cabinet." By controlling the Sanhedrin (which, as we have seen, was the legal "parliament") they were able to enact their secret decisions into law. It was this small group, for example, that determined upon the death of the carpenter's son prior to the official and legal meeting of the Sanhedrin.¹ There was nothing more sinister in all the life of the Jews than this above-the-law gang which met in secret, behind closed doors, and dictated the terms of life for all the people.

Two points of doctrine separated the Pharisees and Sadducees. In the first place, the Sadducees refused to accord the status of scripture to any writings except the Great Book of the Law. The Pharisees, on the other hand, contended that the writings of the prophets had been "inspired"; and something near to "inspiration" was attributed to certain other writings.

In the second place, because the Pentateuch had nothing to say about any resurrection of the body, the Sadducees would have nothing to do with that doctrine and little to do with the doctrine of immortality. The Pharisees, on the other hand, brought the doctrine back with them from Babylon and professed to find support for it in their scriptures.

The Apostle Paul, many years after the crucifixion of Jesus, threw a courtroom into an uproar by merely mentioning the fact that he was an ardent believer in the doctrine of the resurrection (Acts 23:6-7). Both sides thereafter forgot the case against Paul in the controversy with one another.

Quite aside from any theological differences, there was one

¹ Cf. Zeitlin, *Who Crucified Jesus?* Harper and Brothers, pp. 68-83.

very practical difference between the two major parties. The Pharisees might enjoy the overwhelming support of the common people, but the Sadducees held the purse strings of the government. They were, therefore, in a position to ignore public opinion.

Temple Revenues

Though mention has been made of the Temple revenues in another connection, it is necessary to describe the situation in somewhat greater detail.

According to Hebrew law, every Jewish citizen anywhere in the world was expected to make a contribution of a half shekel (about two dollars and a half in terms of modern money) toward the support of the Temple. The figures are a little fuzzy and estimates vary, but there seems to be some reason to believe that there may have been as many as 8,000,000 persons scattered through the world who would have admitted Jewish "citizenship." It is known, for example, that there were almost 1,000,000 Jews in Alexandria in Egypt, alone. It is easy to think that the take from this one item must have run into the millions of dollars annually.

All such funds passed through the hands of the Annas family, who were required to make an accounting to no one. The old Sadducee who headed his house must have been one of the heaviest individual taxpayers in the Empire.

In addition to the Temple tax, there was a long list of auxiliary devices (such as the regulations relative to "clean" doves, mentioned in the preceding chapter) by which Annas and his machine extorted more millions. None of them seemed to deal in any large amounts, but millions of dribblets can create an enormous slush fund.

The demarcation between Sadducee and Pharisee was seldom drawn in Galilee, for there were none of the former and few of the latter who made their home in the northern province. The Galileans were apt to lump them all together and simply blame Jerusalem for their economic woes.

Herod Antipas

Attention has already been called to the fact that Herod Antipas sat upon the throne as the king of Galilee the day that the Nazareth family returned from their brief sojourn in Egypt. He was approaching middle age at the time of his ascent to power; but it was as an old man that he appeared in Jerusalem, at the time of the Passover, the year that Jesus was crucified.

Herod Antipas was, of course, no more than visiting royalty; for he exercised no authority whatever in the Holy City or the Temple courts. That was Pilate's territory, and the haughty

Roman was extremely jealous of his power. From Herod's standpoint it was good politics to be seen conspicuously among the Jews on great festal occasions as his ambition to succeed to his father's power never quite died. His religious obligations rested lightly upon him, for he was actually more pagan than Jew.

Galilean "Foreigners"

It will help us to understand the situation if we remember that all Galileans were "foreigners" in Jerusalem. They might be fellow religionists with the Jerusalem Jews; but, as citizens, they owed political allegiance to Herod. They even spoke a slightly varying language. The Aramaic spoken in Capernaum and Nazareth was not at all the common speech of the Jerusalem Jews. Even little serving girls were quick to identify a man from Galilee by his accent (Matt. 26:69-73).

Even under the best of circumstances the carpenter's son was at a disadvantage in Jerusalem if he fell afoul of the police, whether the officers were Pilate's or Annas'. In the case of the Temple police, the matter was additionally delicate; for they were all in the pay of the Temple hierarchy. From the moment that Jesus upset the tables of the money changers on that historic occasion, he was a marked man. It has been estimated that the affair may have cost Annas as much as \$200,000 in lost business profits. You cannot disturb big business even in a Church without getting into trouble.

Chapter 9

The Carpenter's Son Revolts

"He set his face to go to Jerusalem"—Luke 9:51

ANY ATTEMPT to trace the course of historical events in the life of the carpenter's son, beginning with his boyhood and following through his youth and early manhood, must rest in large part upon conjectures, assumption, and educated guesses. Certainly, the body of factual evidence is extremely limited. Yet there are occasional bits of fact which, when interpreted in the light of related information, do throw light on dark places.

Basic Assumptions

If we are correct in believing—as this writer firmly believes we are—that Joseph's household in Nazareth was a comfortable, middle-class establishment, neither poverty stricken nor overly provided for; and if we are further justified in assuming—as we have assumed—that Jesus was the manager of the carpentering business following the death of Joseph, then we can reconstruct at least a part of the picture.

We can begin with one good, substantial, and important fact. The household in which Jesus was brought up was orderly, comfortable, devout, conservative, unpretentious, law-abiding, and reverent. Four simple items, already described in this study, provide the evidence which supports this conclusion.

Four Revealing Facts

(1) Several stories relating to the birth of Jesus were in circulation. Although they varied in some details and occasionally contradicted each other (Matt. 2:13; Luke 2:39), they nevertheless described Joseph and Mary as being people of honor, deeply spiritual, and profoundly devoted to the ancestral faith of the Jews (Matt. 1:18-2:12; Luke 1:26-2:40).

(2) The city of Nazareth, being one of the priest centers of Galilee, was a community in which piety was encouraged and the Law was respected. The synagogue was a commanding influence in it.

The fact that the carpenter's home must have been an above average Galilean establishment means that, in its religious interests, it was far removed from the bickering and disputatious atmosphere that pervaded so much of the religion of Jerusalem. The fact that there were no Sadducees and no more than a few Pharisees, at most, in the community encouraged serenity along with piety.

(3) The family of the carpenter made regular visits to the Temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:42) on the occasions of the great religious feasts and generally conformed to the Law as far as that was possible for people living so far removed from the Temple.

In this connection, it can safely be assumed that, as a growing boy, the carpenter's son was provided with the best education the city offered. The Jewish philosophy of education may have rested on a narrow base; but, within its limitations, it admitted of nothing slipshod or superficial.

Except for whatever thinking he may have done for himself, Jesus must have grown up as a "good Jew." We are assuming this to be true for the reason that, in his public ministry, he displayed a wide knowledge of Hebrew religious literature and the social ideals of the ancient prophets. Then, in all practical matters such as those with which "the carpenter" had to deal, he was thoroughly prepared.

(4) Quite evidently, Jesus grew up in a conservative community as an independent thinker. We know that Joseph, himself, was quite capable of doing his own thinking (Matt. 1:19-25) without being unduly swayed by mass opinions; and he doubtless taught the boy to be likewise independent. At the age of twelve

the lad demonstrated his independence by following in his own interests in the Temple (Luke 2:46-50).

It is entirely possible that Jesus' disposition to think for himself may have been responsible for the fact that he was not invited to speak from the pulpit of the Nazareth synagogue until after he had made a name for himself abroad. At any rate, on that occasion Nazareth displayed all the usual reactions of a conservative community that considered itself offended by liberalism (Luke 4:16-30).

An Inquiring Mind

Perhaps one additional fact should be noted, but because it stands alone we do not dare to presume on its significance. When Jesus was twelve years of age, Joseph and Mary made their accustomed journey to Jerusalem to participate in the Passover festivities. In the confusion of getting started home, Jesus became separated from his parents and was not found until three days later. When rebuked by his mother, he replied, in some surprise, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

Quite evidently, the family was well acquainted with his deep interest in religious matters; and the boy found it difficult to understand why his absorption in the life at the Temple should have raised any questions. Even as early as his twelfth year, he was displaying an inquiring mind (Luke 2:46) and showing the rare good judgment of seeking answers from authorities who were supposed to know.

About the time that Jesus tarried in the Temple at Jerusalem, feeding his eager mind on the discussions taking place between the great doctors of the Law, there was spreading throughout the pagan world a belief that "the end of the age" was about to occur. No one knows, precisely, where or how the doctrine originated. Actually, it took different forms in different parts of the world. The "mystery religions" of the eastern Mediterranean had taken up the idea and were spreading throughout the Roman world with the assurance that they "possessed the secret" that would insure the individual against the coming chaos.

There were, of course, no agreements among these pagan preachers on the subject of the "secret" or upon the practical details of what the "end of the age" was to be like. The whole matter was invested with mystery, but it was succeeding in at least one respect—it was filling the world with dread.

The Messianic Hope

Among the Jews, with their profound faith in an overshadowing Providence, there was a doctrine which geared into the pagan belief in a rather remarkable way. Every Jew entertained a

lively hope that there was to appear a "messiah" who would be divinely commissioned to lead the Jews in launching a new world order, clearing up the chaos, and establishing righteousness upon the earth.

"Righteousness" was defined as involving peace, justice, human rights, economic prosperity, and universal good will among men. Actually, there was no relation between the pagan doctrine of "the end of the age" and the Jewish doctrine of the new "Kingdom of Heaven" except that each was a belief concerning the end of an age of corruption, injustice, ignorance, and fear. But just as the "mystery religions" declared that they knew the "secret," so the Jews declared the Saviour of the world was to be a Jew—their Messiah.

An Ancient Doctrine

This Jewish doctrine went far back into Hebrew history. The prophet Amos, about the middle of the Eighth Century B.C., had warned the elders of Israel that their confidence in the approaching day of the Lord was a delusion. There was to be such a day, to be sure, but it was to be a day of judgment and not of triumph. "It will be as if a man were fleeing from a lion and ran into a bear" (Amos 5:19). One after another of the prophets who followed took up the refrain.

In Jesus' day this confidence in a divine manifestation in support of the Jews had taken on a different, but nevertheless a fascinating, form.

"The day is coming," the people were assured, "when a leader will appear who has been divinely chosen to lead you to deliverance. In that day all the forces of righteousness will be arrayed against the unrighteous, and evil will be ground down into the earth. Your enemies will be destroyed, wars will be brought to an end, and Judah will be raised up to rule the world. The Chosen of the Lord will bring it to pass."

As a consequence, Jews everywhere waited eagerly for any news that could be construed as a promise that the Messiah was on his way. It was inevitable that, whenever any man began to command the attention of the people, they began to ask, "Is he the one whom we are expecting?" (Luke 7:19).

In the course of the nearly thirty years during which Jesus attended the worship services of the Nazareth synagogue or joined with the discussion groups that met between Sabbaths, he must have heard the matter expounded again and again; for the question of the Messiah was the most absorbing topic of the times. He must have wrestled with the problem through the years. Certainly, when he launched his public ministry, he took a familiar and popular text when he declared that "the kingdom

of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17)—a slogan which he borrowed from John the Baptist (Matt. 3:2).

Legalistic Developments

This great expectation took on a murky coloration in Jerusalem where the Temple authorities assumed the prerogative of dictating the conditions of the Messiah's coming. The scribes and doctors of the Law spoke as though they were entirely sure that they knew the circumstances that would attend his arrival.

As a matter of fact, they arrogated to themselves the right to be his sponsors. In their conceits they proceeded as though he were to initiate his revolutionary program under their auspices and according to their ritual. In other words, they seemed to believe that they enjoyed a monopoly in the case of every man's salvation. Therefore, they set up the conditions under which every man could be saved and proceeded as though they had been divinely empowered to admit some men to the favor of God while denying the divine good will to others.

First of all, there was the rite of circumcision which could be traced all the way back to Abraham (Gen. 17:9-10). In Jesus' day Judaism held out no hope to any man who had not undergone this rite, or who was unwilling to do so. The ranks of Judaism were open to proselytes, of course; and a vigorous program of evangelism was in progress throughout the Roman world in an effort to enlist thousands of pagans (Matt. 23:15). But there was always one unalterable requirement: *The applicant must be prepared to accept the promises on Jewish terms.*

In the second place, a Jew might hope to enjoy rank in the Messiah's kingdom only if he kept the Law; and the Temple hierarchy presumed to write the interpretations thereof. The hierarchy decided which offerings were acceptable at the sacred altars and which were not. The hierarchy decided when a man had kept the Sabbath and when he had not. The hierarchy approved, or repudiated, the tithes and the ceremonial cleansings.

Under Annas' administration, all these things carried a price tag. In assuming dictatorial powers, the priestly authorities had debased the religion of Israel to the point where it had become rigid, insensible, self-righteous, proud, vainglorious, and legalistic, destroying the souls of men and corrupting their spirits.

Group Reactions

Organized groups such as the Essenes (and there were others) had revolted against this tendency. At first they seem to have made an effort to take the Temple system captive; but, failing in this, they had seceded and set up their own centers, schools,

priesthoods, rituals, and systems. Most of them had given up all hope of witnessing any reform inside the Temple system and were awaiting some direct action from God. This, they were confident, was sure to come.

Occasional individuals, like John the Baptist, had retreated to the deserts to live as hermits and work out their own individual salvation.

An Impassioned Moralist

John the Baptist was in no sense of the word a theologian. Instead, he was an impassioned moralist crying out against the outrages of his time, whether they appeared in high or low places. He revelled in the power of independence, striking out with equal conviction against kings and grafting soldiers. His preaching enunciated no new doctrine, and he arrayed himself against no theological system. But with all the power of a dedicated soul who feared no man, he attacked the indecencies and injustices of his time, calling upon the Jews to repent.

He spared no one. From Herod Antipas—who was living incestuously with his brother's wife—to the brutal Roman private soldiers who browbeat the helpless peasants, including the priests who deluded themselves into thinking that their phylacteries covered their sins (Matt. 23:5), John applied the scourge.

"The kingdom of heaven is at hand!" he shouted, and his voice echoed up and down the Jordan Valley until the nation was in an uproar. As a consequence, tens of thousands of Jews streamed down into the desert to hear him preach (Matt. 3:1-12; Mark 1:4-8; Luke 3:2-14; John 1:19-34).

The spirit of revolt was in the air; and, had John been a revolutionist, he could have headed a host that might have shaken the Roman Empire. As a matter of fact, the authorities in Jerusalem (and only a little less in Caesarea) were so profoundly disturbed that they sent a deputation to the scene to investigate (Matt. 3:7; John 1:19-28).

As the carpenter's son stood just a little apart from the crowd, listening intently to every word that issued from the prophet's lips, he found something profound and powerful moving within him. John was putting into livid words the very things he had been thinking; and, when the opportunity presented itself, he stepped forward and asked to be baptized and to be identified with the national repentance which the Baptist was demanding.

Jesus had witnessed the abuses operating inside the Temple system, and he had experienced the rapacity of the priests and Annas' henchmen. In Galilee he had paid taxes and knew the cruelties of the prevailing system. He was, therefore, prepared

to ally himself with any movement that promised relief and that seemed to have the endorsement of God.

Significance of the Baptism

One hardly dares be too precise in describing what happened, for the New Testament record is incomplete and a bit vague. But at least one thing is perfectly plain: *When the carpenter's son came up out of the baptismal water, he was no longer the carpenter of Nazareth. He had been called of God to become a divine messenger, and he had accepted his commission. Thereafter he was to proclaim the good news that the Kingdom of Heaven had begun among men.*

From that hour he was a man with a divine mission. The reticent, meditative, self-effacing carpenter had become a prophet. Multitudes flocked to hear him when he spoke (Matt. 7:29), and mighty works attended his words. Everywhere men became convinced that one had appeared who was declaring the sure word of God. At one time Herod Antipas even thought he was the martyred John come back to life (Matt. 14:1-2).

After thirty years in Nazareth, and many years in the carpentering business there, he was in revolt against the corrupt and institutionalized religion of his times! He was off on a crusade to save the souls of men!

Chapter 10

The Carpenter's Message

"And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee"—Luke 4:14

JESUS' BAPTISM at the hands of John had been attended by circumstances which were, admittedly, just a bit unnerving (Matt. 3:17). As an initiate in the new movement of the Kingdom of Heaven, therefore, he set off into the wilderness to think his way through his problem.

For years, as the carpenter of Nazareth, he had meditated on the subject of God, of life, of organized religion, and of the divine purpose in history. But that simple desert rite of baptism, together with the divine commission which attended it, had thrust him into the very center of Jewish hopes and expectations. Obviously, his whole way of life would have to be revised.

Succession of Alternatives

A succession of alternatives confronted him. Should he attempt to overthrow the existing system by force? Should he undertake to captivate the multitudes by performing miracles for their mystification? Should he seek to put himself into a position

where he might hope to profit personally from the revolution? Should he use his opportunities for his own advantage?

For a description of his decision it is necessary to follow him through the next three years, listening as he teaches the people the great truths concerning the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is noteworthy that he made no effort whatever to overthrow the Temple hierarchy, nor did he ever counsel armed resistance to Rome. He did not even inveigh against the legalism which had reduced religion to a cold and heartless agglomeration of rules and regulations which no man could observe with complete fidelity. As a matter of fact, on one occasion he said, quite frankly, "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17).

Spiritual Conversations

Quite unlike John the Baptist, who preached to multitudes and made dramatic appeals for repentance and moral reform, Jesus went about among the people talking quietly and persuasively to individuals, to twos and threes, and he could persuade them to listen.

By far the larger part of his activity consisted of conversations with friends, critics, inquirers, hosts, and those who undertook to engage him in arguments for some reason of their own. Quite unlike the Greek philosophers and the preachers of the mystery religions who delivered extended lectures on abstruse themes, however, the carpenter's son followed the custom of the rabbis of the time and told pithy little stories, each of which was designed to teach but a single lesson (Luke 7:36-50). It often happened, when some dilemma was presented to him for a solution, that he would answer with a parable instead of a labored defense (Luke 10:25-37).

Because his parables were pithy presentations of great truths, and because the oriental mind was trained to memorize with great fidelity, his anecdotes gained great currency and began to influence the thinking of the public in a remarkable way. Some of them, obviously aimed at the Temple authorities, were unanswerable. These were quoted with glee by the plain people and the underdogs who suffered under the scorn and the contempt of the pious and the privileged. It was inevitable, therefore, that the carpenter's son should have become an object of hatred at the hands of the ruling class while he was becoming popular with the plain people.

Access to God

In the first place, Jesus taught that every man's relationship

with God was an intensely personal and private affair. He did not question the need of organization in religion, but he protested vigorously when the organization interfered with a man's access to God. He had no thought of destroying the ancient morality which was based on the Law laid down by Moses. He hoped only to liberate the system from the tyranny of the priests and the self-appointed interpreters who had made life a burden and God a petty tyrant.

Again and again he declared that every individual must deal directly with the Most High and that no man was under any necessity of going through a third party. However loyal he may have been to the synagogue and the Temple, he recognized no individual or institution as having any commission to interfere between men and their heavenly Father. While he admitted the value of rites and ceremonies, he refused to concede their right to dictate to the soul of men.

All this had the effect of cutting out the middleman and of stripping the Temple of its totalitarian powers. If, for example, a humble Nazareth carpenter were truly sorry for his misdeeds, Jesus insisted that he had the right to offer his penitential prayers directly to God and assume that he had immediate forgiveness in return (Matt. 6:6, 16-18). The prayer could even be offered inside his own home with just as much effectiveness as if it had been offered at the Jerusalem Temple.

If each individual were to be granted the right to go directly to God with the burden of his transgressions, however, and if he were to be assured that he might expect the private and confidential guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 7:17) in solving his personal problems, then a base was established upon which one might declare his independence of priest, ceremony, Temple, sacrifice, ecclesiastical decree, or any other form that spiritual tyranny might assume. All such instruments might have value, of course; but none of them, according to Jesus' principles, had final authority over men's souls. That rested with God, and every individual had an equal right to approach the Divine and work out his own agreements and conciliations.

None of the foregoing is to be interpreted as meaning that Jesus proposed to destroy the Temple system or to liquidate the Law. As a matter of fact, he used the Temple and its services to enrich his own spiritual life.

When the Temple authorities were searching for every possible charge they could lay against him, no one ever arose to say that he had not offered the proper sacrifices, that he had not presented the two turtle doves, or that he had failed to subscribe to the ancient rituals in a reverent fashion. He might be critical of the priestly system, but he did not withdraw from the Temple.

Worth of Individuals

The second great basic conviction in Jesus' teaching was that each individual was of supreme value in the sight of God—that the worth of the humblest and lowliest individual was infinitely greater than that of all the material things on this earth (Mark 8:36). He even went so far as to say that little children, even those who had not reached the age of responsibility, were infinitely precious in the sight of God and were to be treated with reverence as though they were God's prized possessions (Matt. 18:6).

This was to say, in effect, that God's estimate of the worth of a man was to be applied to every self-conscious personality (Matt. 7:11; Luke 11:13). Men might differ in their abilities and capacities, but there was no difference in the love and concern with which God viewed them (Matt. 25:40).

It was a great moment in the history of religion when a man who had been trained as a loyal Jew could honestly say, as Simon Peter said after three years with Jesus, "I perceive that God shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34).

The Jewish theologians had built up an elaborate religious system which laid supreme emphasis on obedience to law. But Jesus went one step farther. According to the Temple teaching, a man who committed murder was guilty of a terrible sin; but Jesus declared that the man who hated another man to the point that he would be willing to kill him if he had the chance, but withheld from doing so because he was afraid of being punished, was guilty of actual murder. Or, to put the principle in another light, if a man lusted after a woman and was willing to commit adultery with her if the opportunity presented itself, he was guilty of actual adultery. In other words, the purpose and even the inner thought (Matt. 5:28) were as actual and as real as the act itself. The willingness to sin was as frightful as the act of sinning.

Worship of God

In one of the greatest conversations he ever held—an exchange with a reprobate woman of Samaria—Jesus said that a person must worship God "in spirit" or he did not worship at all (John 4:7-26). This had the effect of putting handles on the Divine by which even the most underprivileged might take hold. It meant, furthermore, that if a Galilean were worshipping God "in spirit" in Samaria, he was as acceptable as if he had made the journey to Jerusalem and had presented himself before the Temple altars.

All this summed up in a dangerous doctrine; and the Temple authorities were quick to see that, if the carpenter's teachings were widely accepted, their spiritual monopoly was doomed. The

bitterness with which they came to hate Jesus is understandable, at least.

The capstone of the teaching of the carpenter's son was contained in his assurance that a Holy Spirit might be expected to flow in upon the soul of a man from the heart of God if the individual were truly penitent, and if he came to an agreement with the Divine. This would mean that, in exchange for the forgiveness of his sins, the man was to make it the supreme purpose of his life to do the will of God. In time this question of whether or not the believer had "received the Spirit" became the basic test of membership in the movement.

Total Impact

The total result of the teachings of the carpenter's son was that all men were offered emancipation from the spiritual tyranny of the Jewish hierarchy and of the elaborate legal system of the Temple organization without in any way lowering either moral or spiritual standards. Actually, his principles had the effect of heightening the spiritual responsibility of the individual immeasurably.

It was inevitable, of course, that such teachings should be counterattacked by the forces of institutionalized religion. No monopolist ever surrenders power without a struggle, whether he be a religionist or an economic overlord.

In a variety of ways, and on many occasions, Jesus declared himself in favor of an entirely new way of life—a manner of living almost completely contradictory to the standard of values commonly accepted by the religious and political leaders. Anyone who has dabbled in reform is well aware of the danger that inheres in tampering with such matters.

Nowhere in all the life of that day was self-righteousness or spiritual conceit rebuked. Everywhere it was commonly accepted.

It was a common sight, for example, to see men standing on street corners in the posture of prayer for no better reason than that they hoped to attract attention to their piety (Matt. 6:5). The philanthropic planned their publicity alongside their alms-giving. Religious leaders wore elaborate costumes which marked them as "godly men" (Matt. 23:5). A thousand devices had been invented, each one calculated to call the attention of the public to the "righteousness" of the exhibitionist.

Against all this Jesus directed scathing denunciations. He urged his followers to go into secret closets to do their praying (Matt. 6:6) and charged them to disburse their alms without ostentation (Matt. 6:1-4).

The behavior of guests at a dinner party—even that of high ranking people—was an open scandal. Because places near to

the host were reckoned as seats of honor, there was always a wild and unseemly scramble when dinner was announced so that otherwise dignified men stooped to the manners of street brawlers in an attempt to seize those sittings which would make them appear important. As an invited guest in rich and cultured homes Jesus had witnessed disgusting contests for empty honors, and he warned his followers against such practices in the most earnest fashion. It was an effort on the part of Jesus to restore a sense of decent behavior to life (Luke 14:7-11).

A Different Way of Life

Jewish society was saturated with hatred. Sadducees contended with Pharisees, Zealots plotted against Romans, Galileans were bitter toward Judeans. Unscrupulous rivalries cropped up everywhere. Self-seekers went unrebuked, mercy was a rarity (John 5:7), vanity was not even ridiculed.

To Jesus all this was like salt in a wound. The way of life he proposed was, then, something completely different. The way of the times and the way he was urging might have come from two entirely different worlds (John 18:36).

For one remark he made the authorities were forever unwilling to forgive him. "The harlots will go into the kingdom of God ahead of you" (Matt. 21:31) he had said in addressing a group of notables. By this he meant that among some of the worst elements of the town there were virtues he had sought in vain among some of the best people. But when those same "best people" conceive a grudge, or when their vanity is punctured, they find it very difficult to forgive.

As time went on, it began to appear that "the kingdom of heaven" of which Jesus spoke was not to be a political upheaval engineered by God, but a new way of life that was to develop among men. The thing that made all this so offensive to the religious leaders was the fact that, in proposing his Kingdom, he had by-passed them completely. His teachings concerning every man's relation with God freed the individual from the spiritual monopoly of the priestly system.

In preaching the Kingdom of Heaven Jesus proposed to establish an entirely new set of values. "The meek," he said, as if holding the braggarts and swashbucklers in contempt, "are to inherit the earth." Among the Romans a willingness to forgive was esteemed to be little less than cowardice, but Jesus insisted that men should forgive their enemies until the last dregs of animosity were drained out of their souls. Servants were to be honored (Matt. 23:11); the poor were to be respected (Mark 12:41-44); humility was esteemed as a mark of gentility.

The revolutionary character of Jesus' preaching was heightened

by the fact that he was a carpenter's son who had never been schooled in any rabbinical classroom. He carried credentials from no professionally religious group. Even his dialect was against him, for he spoke the rough Aramaic in the same common fashion as did every other Galilean. Though he wore the genteel garments of a moderately successful businessman (Matt. 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:24), he was, after all, a "man from the country."

Chapter 11

Then the Trap Was Sprung

*"Have you come out as against a robber
with swords and clubs to capture me?"*

—Matt. 26:55

IT WAS INEVITABLE that such a one as the carpenter's son should run afoul of the

Temple authorities. It was impossible for anyone to interfere with the economic operations of the Temple without making enemies (John 2:15-22); and it was equally dangerous to hold the High Priestly office up to scorn, or to ridicule the professional religious leaders (Matt. 23:25; Luke 11:19). Dire reprisals were almost inevitable.

Aroused Enmity

Long before Jesus appeared in Jerusalem escorted by a wildly demonstrating multitude of Galilean shepherds, farmers, and fisher folk who acclaimed him as their prophet and who hailed him as the long awaited deliverer of the people, he had aroused the suspicions of the Jerusalem machine.

Gossip that filtered down from Nazareth, Nain, Cana, and

Capernaum concerning his activities and his preaching had fallowed the minds of the authorities in favor of some form of liquidation. If it could be done quietly, so much the better. But, at any rate, something had to be done. After all, Caesar held Annas and Caiaphas (his son-in-law) responsible for maintaining public order; and if the carpenter showed a disposition to defy the established order, their duty was clear. Certainly, he could not be allowed to lead the people astray.

The vested interests of the old High Priest and his family were much too great to permit any disturbing of the peace. The charge against him was, then, both political and economic—undermining authority and interfering with the conduct of a legal business.

The most disturbing element in the case was the fact that the carpenter's son set himself up as an authority. He even claimed a right to speak which, he said, was superior to that of the Temple hierarchy. Worse, even, was his presumption in daring to rewrite scripture (Matt. 5:31). He actually declared that he was speaking for God himself (John 17:8).

So far as the Temple authorities were concerned, the case was further complicated by the fact that his disciples declared that he was the long expected Messiah (Matt. 16:16); and it did not help his case when he was hauled before the Roman governor and questioned about the matter that he did not deny it (Matt. 27:11).

Pilate's Difficult Position

Pilate, the Roman procurator, was in a difficult position. He was not, actually, a good administrator. On at least two previous occasions he had infuriated the Jews with inept moves; and, as a consequence, he had been reprimanded by the emperor. If he made a third mistake and again became a target for imperial wrath, it might be very serious. Inasmuch as Judea represented a highly lucrative procuratorship, he was especially anxious not to jeopardize further his already precarious post. Though he might despise Annas and his henchmen, the circumstances required that he manage somehow to get along with them.

Even so, it might have been possible to smooth things over in spite of the near-riot which the carpenter had precipitated in the Temple the morning of his arrival from Galilee. The old High Priest was irate, but he might have been persuaded to hold his temper for the sake of keeping the peace.

But the Galilean's amazing popularity with the crowds, his magnetic personal appeal, his dignified defiance of the Temple authorities, and the danger that the situation might get out of hand combined to bring matters to a climax. The multitudes were so evidently friendly to the carpenter, however, that it was

necessary to proceed with the utmost care (Matt. 21:46) lest the authorities overplay their hands. The case was really very sticky.

At a critical juncture in the proceedings a rare bit of good fortune fell into their laps. One of Jesus' disciples appeared out of the night with a proposal that he would betray his Master into their hands for a price. It seemed almost too good to be true; but they did not allow themselves to be surprised out of a good bargain, and the deal was closed with the payment of thirty pieces of silver to the traitor (Matt. 26:15)—about the price of an ordinary slave.

Speedy Climax

From that point on the proceedings raced to a climax. Witnesses were bribed, a case was made out, Pilate was badgered, and by nine o'clock in the morning the carpenter's son hung suspended from a Cross that had been hurriedly raised atop a barren hill just outside the wall of Jerusalem.

Throughout the long and terrible day Jesus agonized while a jeering crowd of ruffians watched and waited. Meanwhile two outlaws hung on two other crosses, one on each side of him, paying the penalty for outlawry and brigandage. Then, by the time the sun was setting, it was discovered that the carpenter was dead.

At that point a surprising thing happened. Two prominent men of the community—one a rich man (Matt. 27:57) from the little town of Arimathea, nearby Jerusalem, and the other a Pharisee who was a member of the Sanhedrin (John 7:50)—came on the scene bearing papers from Pilate showing that they had been given authority to take the body down and give it proper burial. One of them had only recently carved a new tomb out of the limestone rock (John 19:41), and *the carpenter was buried in a borrowed grave.*

In that moment, however, someone remembered that he had once said a very strong thing: "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away*" (Matt. 24:35). They might kill the carpenter's son, but they could not kill the hope he had raised within the hearts of men concerning God!

Chapter 12

Very Early in the Morning

"Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark"—John 20:1

THE WORLD does not realize even yet the very great debt it owes to those who go out very early in the morning while it is yet dark, before all the facts are in, blazing a trail of faith whereon the late-comers will walk in security many days later.

The Wonder of the Whole

The story of the carpenter's son from this point on belongs to another study which is quite outside the scope of this little volume. But at least a few of the facts must be recorded here that the reader may sense something of the wonder of the whole.

From Friday night until sometime early on the morning of the first day of the week the body of the carpenter's son lay in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. In the meantime, a few of his followers hid away in a secret rendezvous in the city of Jerusalem and awaited the passing of the Sabbath and the dawning of the

first day of the week, when they might hope to escape the clutches of the Jerusalem police and work their way back to Galilee.

No one had any exact plans; no one could anticipate what might happen; no one knew how far the vindictiveness of the High Priest might reach. But at least it was going to be better back in Galilee where their dialect did not make them marked men and where Herod's police might possibly be well disposed.

The Living Lord

Just as the dawn was breaking on the morning of that first day of the week, a young girl from Magdala, the Galilean village whereat Simon and Andrew's saltern was located, came clamoring at the door of the disciples' hideaway with the incredible news that she had seen their Lord alive. The tomb was empty! He had spoken to her! He had called her by her name (John 20:11-18)!

From this point on the story takes off in an entirely new direction. The little band of followers, suddenly transformed into evangelists, fanned out into the world with the word that "He is risen! He is not dead! He is alive!"

And as men believed, they found a divine spirit inflowing upon their lives as the carpenter's son had said it would. In spite of persecution, terrorism, and martyrdoms, the movement grew.

At first, Caesar tried to ignore them. Then he tried to destroy them. But opposition only seemed to scatter the salt. Eventually, there actually sat upon the throne of Rome an emperor who confessed that he was, himself, a believer!

So the spirit of the carpenter's son lives on to this day. The world into which he came killed him, and the world into which he sends his disciples cannot be expected to deal gently with them. *But if any man would come after him, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow him* (Matt. 16:24).

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